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ABSTRACT

In June 1998, California started an evaluation of standards-based accountability. The evaluation focused on the status and impact of local accountability systems, content standards, assessment measures, use of data, consequences and incentives, and assistance in school districts across the state. In the course of the study, the California legislature enacted a new state-driven accountability plan that replaced the system the evaluation was examining. Data from the field thus reflected the existing program and attitudes toward the new program, which included an academic performance index and assistance, intervention, and incentives plans for schools. The school district was the primary unit of analysis, and the cornerstone of the evaluation was a survey of 200 California school districts that included the state's 120 largest districts. Interviews with administrators and teachers, as well as educational policymakers, provided study data. At the time of the surveys, most districts were still in the early stages of developing their local standards-based accountability system. The most common elements implemented to that point were content standards and assessments. Findings show that the development of accountability systems is a long and messy process. Although people hold varying views on accountability, many equate it with assessment. Many people support the concept of accountability, but there is less support for the details of its implementation. Recommendations are made for coherence in the accountability system, communication about accountability, assessment for accountability, and capacity building. Overall, educators in California need to align what already exists more than they need to move forward with new initiatives. An appendix contains the application for funding categorical aid programs and the interview protocols from the study. (Contains 27 figures and 37 references. (SLD)

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Evaluation of California's Standards-Based Accountability System

Final Report

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November 1999

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Executive Summary

In June of 1998, the California Department of Education (CDE) awarded a contract to WestEd, in collaboration with Management Analysis and Planning, Inc. (MAP), to evaluate standards-based accountability in California. The evaluation was designed to examine the state's Standards-Based Accountability System and its relationship with other accountability efforts and initiatives. In particular, the evaluation focused on the status and impact of local accountability systems, content standards, assessment measures, use of data, consequences and incentives, and challenges and assistance in school districts across the state.

California's Standards-Based Accountability System was established in 1997 by CDE in response to federal requirements of Title I of the Improving America's School Act (IASA), and in accordance with the state's IASA plan. The Standards-Based Accountability program was largely a system of locally defined programs. Districts were expected to develop and adopt local content and performance standards (comparable to state standards) and to use multiple assessment measures to determine whether students were meeting the local standards. As part of the state's Consolidated Application for Funding Categorical Aid Programs, Part II, districts were required to report on the progress of their standards-based accountability systems. In particular, districts were to include a description of their accountability and assessment system along with student achievement data for all schools within the district.

Significant events occurred during the study which have some bearing on its implications. In April of 1999, the legislature enacted and the governor signed a new state-driven accountability program, the Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA) of 1999. This law created three basic components, which together constitute a new statewide accountability system: 1) the Academic Performance Index (API), an index to rank the performance of schools; 2) the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP), an assistance and intervention program for schools who fall below expectations; and 3) the High Achieving/Improving Schools Program (HA/ISP), a rewards program for schools who exceed them.

The system created by the PSAA essentially replaced the program that this study was in the midst of evaluating. Districts still have the option to continue developing their own standards-based systems, but they will no longer be required by the state to use multiple measures or to submit accountability reporting information as part of the Consolidated Application. This change in law meant that, as data were being collected from the field on accountability, much of the information reported by district and school personnel reflected not only the progress to date on the pre-existing program, but also reactions to the PSAA.

Research Questions

Ten major research questions served as the focus of the evaluation of the Standards-Based Accountability system:

1. At what stage or level are districts in planning and implementing their standards-based accountability systems?
2. What is the nature of local content and performance standards in language arts and mathematics and how do they compare with the state standards? What mechanism does the district use to compare its standards with the state's model standards?
3. To what degree have district standards been implemented in schools? At what stage or level are districts and schools in planning and implementing the district standards?
4. What is the nature of local assessments for standards-based accountability and how are they used to determine whether a student has met or has not met the local standards?
5. How are data from local accountability systems used?
6. What types of performance targets do districts set for schools?
7. What types of incentives do districts provide for schools to meet their targets? What consequences do schools face if they do not meet the targets?
8. What practices or features of a district's standards and accountability system are associated with particular educational outcomes and practices?
9. What practices of the state education agency and other education-related institutions and assistance centers help or hinder districts in implementing their standards and accountability systems?
10. What obstacles do districts face in implementing a standards-based accountability system and how can the state education agency and other educational institutions and assistance centers help districts in overcoming those obstacles?

Conceptual Framework

In addition, the research team developed a conceptual framework as a lens through which to view accountability. The conceptual framework designed by the research team includes

broad elements of an "ideal" accountability system. In particular, the conceptual framework has six interrelated and reinforcing elements:

- Alignment of state and local content standards
- Student performance standards and aligned assessments
- Ongoing data analyses and reviews of school performance
- School improvement and intervention strategy
- Stakeholder involvement and engagement
- Continuous improvement of an accountability system

Methodology

The school district constituted the primary unit of analysis for the evaluation. Researchers also focused some attention on the state and school levels, primarily through interviews. Evaluators employed a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods and a variety of data collection instruments. The evaluation questions and the conceptual framework served as the basis for design of the data collection instruments.

An extensive survey of 200 California schools districts about their accountability practices formed the cornerstone of the evaluation. The sample of 200 districts included the state's 120 largest districts, 50 "medium-size" districts, and 30 "small" districts; 133 districts (66.5%) returned their questionnaire. The questionnaire, administered in the spring of 1999, included items on the following topic areas: local accountability system features, content standards, student assessment measures, analysis and use of data, review of school performance, and helps and hindrances.

Interviews conducted at several levels formed another key component of the study. At the state level, interviews were conducted with several top-level policymakers, including legislators, legislative staff, and officials from the Governor's Office and the State Board of Education. In addition, information was obtained from five high-level "policy implementers" at the California Department of Education. These interviews took place early in 1999.

At the district level, members of the research team interviewed personnel in each of seven school districts during the spring of 1999. The interview protocol included questions about accountability in general, standards, timelines, the roles of various actors in the accountability system, the use of data, challenges faced, successful practices, sources of assistance, and the new state accountability system. Research staff also spoke with representatives from about 30 small districts at a conference in March 1999.

Project staff were able to leverage school-level visits from another CDE-sponsored study, the Mathematics Implementation Study, also being conducted by WestEd/MAP. In the spring of 1999, trained mathematics observers interviewed and visited the classrooms of 55 teachers in eight California school districts; 28 were fourth-grade teachers and 27 were eighth-grade teachers. The principals at most of the schools also were interviewed. Although the interviews and classroom observations centered on matters related to mathematics instruction, they also touched on accountability, standards, and assessment.

Other data collection instruments used in the evaluation included the following: a review of five districts' English/language arts and mathematics standards; the CDE review forms of 190 districts' accountability plans (from the 1998–1999 Consolidated Applications); and a project review of 36 district accountability plans.

Major findings of the evaluation are summarized below.

The Status of Local Accountability Systems

Less than three years ago, the California Department of Education first directed California school districts to begin work on local standards-based accountability systems. Since that directive, some districts have made remarkable progress in designing systems, while others are still struggling over the first hurdles. Presented here is a summary of the study's findings about the status of local accountability system design and implementation in the spring of 1999, as well as about educators' conceptions of and views about accountability in general.

- **Most districts were still in the early stages of developing their local standards-based accountability systems.**

A standards-based accountability system, a complex entity with multiple components such as content standards, aligned assessment and professional development, and consequences and incentives, takes time to plan and implement. A majority of districts (56.6 %) reported on the district survey that their standards-based accountability systems were still "in development." But some components enjoyed wide implementation.

The most common elements implemented to date are content standards and assessments. Over 57 percent of district survey respondents reported that their districts had "fully implemented" grade-level content standards in English/language arts and mathematics. The use of multiple assessment measures to determine whether students meet grade-level standards was similarly well under way in more than 60 percent of districts. For about 75 percent of these districts, however, implementation of content standards and multiple

assessment measures was still a relatively recent thing, having occurred only in the past two years.

Unlike content standards and assessment measures, interventions and rewards have rarely been implemented. Less than 30 percent of district survey respondents reported that their districts had fully implemented district intervention strategies for low-performing schools. About 85 percent of districts said that they had *not* implemented district rewards or incentives for high-performing or improving schools.

These data, taken as a whole, suggest that California school districts have been moving ahead in developing their accountability systems. Their focus, however, has been on the instructional framework — content standards and assessments — and not yet on the supporting structure (such as interventions for schools) to make the system work. Interviews generally confirmed this impression. For example, some district administrators who were interviewed suggested that although their districts have "assessment systems," they do not yet have full-fledged accountability systems.

- **Development of accountability mechanisms is a long, sometimes messy process.**

The process of developing a district accountability system is far from quick and straightforward. This may stem from districts' efforts to use a community-based approach to accountability system development. Survey results and interviews suggest that districts have typically sought wide participation in the development of their accountability systems. In many districts, teachers, principals, other school administrators, schools board members, parents, and business and community members have been involved, along with district administrators. Although the inclusion of such a wide range of stakeholders in the development of the system may help engender support for it, the drawback is that the process takes time, especially when factoring in other matters, such as careful attention to state requirements.

The length of time that districts have been developing their accountability systems is highly variable, as is the amount of resources with which they have to work. Findings suggest that small rural districts and medium-sized districts have had greater difficulty in developing and implementing their systems than large districts, most likely due to limited capacity.

- **People hold varying views on what constitutes accountability, but many equate it with assessment.**

Study results show that conceptions of accountability are often not uniform — even within the same district or school. In more than one district, different district administrators who were interviewed did not even agree about whether their district *had* an accountability system, *per se*. The same was often true at the school level. In one school, for example, the principal remarked, "The factors that have the most influence over teacher practice are test

scores and district accountability." A teacher in this school, however, said, "There is none," in response to a question about accountability.

Clearly, accountability means different things to different people. One of the more commonly held conceptions, however, is that accountability is synonymous with assessment. Even before the PSAA put heavy emphasis on the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) test — the Stanford Achievement Test, 9th Edition, Form T (SAT-9), many district and school staff viewed the SAT-9 as the embodiment of accountability, as represented by the following comments from teachers who were interviewed:

> *We are held accountable for our student scores on the SAT-9. The district expects scores to go up.*
>
> *The SAT-9 test is our accountability system.*
>
> *We have the SAT-9. We seem to base everything on it.*

Other important components, such as consequences and incentives, were mentioned far less frequently in response to general questions about accountability, both on the survey and in district and school interviews.

- **There is strong support for the concept of accountability — less so for the details of its implementation.**

Overall study results suggest that most people, particularly at the district level, believe in the potential of accountability systems to raise student achievement. Many district survey respondents, for example, reacted positively to the PSAA, as shown by the following representative comments:

> *It's huge!...In the long run, it will be valuable and help our kids.*
>
> *In the long run, it should create more sense of responsibility for the staff, since they are being asked to be accountable for what is happening in the classroom.*
>
> *Mandated accountability will drive the district to review current programs and practices and make adjustments for improved student performance.*

Nevertheless, many district administrators were concerned about some of the specifics of accountability system implementation, indicating that accountability still has a long way to go before it can meet the high expectations districts and schools have for it. The range of concerns is illustrated by the following comments:

> *In favor of accountability but needs to be aligned to curriculum standards.*

Once the augmented test is improved, the pending legislation will be positive. It will drive change. ...However, the augmented test in its current configuration will not give us meaningful information.

We are concerned that important factors (poverty, transiency, LEP numbers) will not be taken into account.

Theoretically, it is sound and necessary. Timelines are unrealistic and the financial support is not there (i.e., increased need for extensive staff development while at the same time SBCP days were eliminated).

The state needs a "master plan" to help guide the school accountability process. State legislation is coming faster than districts can implement and assess the outcomes.

Content Standards

Content standards — what students should know and be able to do — are the first building block of a standards-based accountability system. If schools are going to be held accountable for ensuring that students master certain content, that content must be clearly specified. Content standards perform that function. In California, districts developed their own local standards, but these standards were required to be aligned with the standards adopted by the State Board of Education. This section summarizes the evaluation findings about district development and adoption of content standards, the relationship of the local standards to the state standards, and the impact of standards on curriculum and instruction in the classroom.

- **Almost all districts have only recently completed a lengthy, broad-based standards development process.**

About 90 percent of district survey respondents reported that their districts have adopted mathematics and English/language arts content standards, although not all districts had fully implemented them. For most of these districts, this adoption has taken place in the past three years. In almost every district, all schools and students are held to the same set of standards.

> ***"I believe standards are important. You have to know where you're going before you take off or you're just going to be everywhere. ... I think standards have also helped us talk about what we do."***
>
> ***— Teacher***

The development of standards appears to be a lengthy, complicated, iterative, and ongoing process. For example, in one district where committees of principals and teachers developed key indicators of what students should be able to do at each level and provided examples of student work, the development of standards (and aligned assessments) has been a four-year process of revisions. In fact, as of the time of the interviews in this district, it was still considered to be an ongoing work-in-progress.

- **Districts claim that the state standards were used to develop or modify local standards, but the rigor of local standards remains uncertain.**

District survey results indicate that, after the state standards were adopted by the State Board of Education, most local districts either adopted the state standards in whole or used them for comparison purposes in the development of new or modification of existing local standards. Given that many districts already had developed local standards prior to the establishment of state standards, alignment of the existing local standards with the state standards was sometimes a source of frustration.

Over 85 percent of district survey respondents reported that their districts had either compared the district standards to the state standards for rigor or had simply adopted the state standards. Among districts who made the comparison, most respondents (90 percent for English/language arts and 80 percent for mathematics) reported that the district standards were "as rigorous" or "more rigorous" than the state standards. However, an independent analysis of some districts' local standards, conducted by project staff, raised questions about such claims, revealing that districts' appraisals of rigor may have been overly optimistic.

- **Local content standards have yet to make a consistent impact at the classroom level.**

Many district survey respondents reported that the majority of teachers are using local standards in the classroom. For example, 54 of 108 respondents (50%) estimated that the district mathematics standards were reflected in the classroom teaching of 75 percent or more of district teachers. School-level observations and interviews, however, suggested that the classroom-level implementation of the standards may not be at the high level suggested by the district responses. There appeared to be a widening disparity in how content standards were understood and used as they filtered down to the school and classroom levels.

> ***"I don't think teachers are very tuned to the standards. There's confusion. Our people are lost. Our standards aren't exactly the same as the state's and there's confusion about why they would have different standards."***
>
> ***—Principal***

For example, at the school level, interviews revealed considerable confusion and frustration about different sets of standards or about having standards changing. One mathematics teacher remarked:

> *At all three levels [national, state, district] we have been bombarded. When we, as the math department, were given the standards, the NCTM, state, and local standards all conflicted with each other. We adopted the NCTM standards, which used to be closely aligned with the state standards. The state standards are what we are tested on. The new state standards are very different…It seems like a moving target. Every couple of years the state comes out with a different strategy and we all change and then things change again.*

Moreover, interviewers found a great deal of variability in how standards were used and implemented, even within districts and within schools. A teacher in one school claimed that the district standards "are on the wall in every classroom" and said that "our jobs as teachers are linked to these standards." However, another teacher in the same school commented, "As for the district standards, I'm a new teacher and not aware of what they are exactly."

Perhaps as a result of the lack of consistency and the high level of confusion regarding standards, direct impact of the standards on curriculum and instruction appeared to be relatively low or somewhat superficial in most schools that were visited. Several mathematics teachers who were interviewed did not mention standards at all when asked how they decided what content to teach, and a few suggested that the district standards "did not apply" to them or to their students. Some felt that the state standards hold unrealistically high expectations for students and are overwhelming.

The low level of impact of standards on instruction may stem from insufficient alignment between curriculum and standards and from inadequate time spent on standards-related professional development. When asked to rate the extent to which district-adopted instructional materials are aligned with district content standards, less than half of survey respondents (for both mathematics and English/language arts) indicated a "great" level of alignment, although about 40 percent indicated a "moderate" level of alignment.

As for professional development, only about 25 percent of district survey respondents reported that, in a given year, they require more than three days of standards-related professional development for teachers.

> ***"Our major job next year is to align curriculum, see if we're achieving the standards, and understand what the assessments show about changes that need to be made."***
>
> ***—Principal***
>
> ***"What they are doing is an excellent goal, it's just too fast without enough training time for teachers."***
>
> ***—Teacher***

Nearly as many (roughly 20 percent) said that they require less than one day. For many teachers, focusing instruction on content standards would require a major shift not only in teaching practice but in teaching philosophy — a shift that would be unlikely to occur in the absence of sustained, meaningful professional development and capacity-building.

Assessment Measures

Along with content standards, assessment constitutes another key component of an effective accountability system. If students are to demonstrate their mastery of the content standards, they must have a forum through which to do so, and assessments that are aligned with the standards provide that forum.

The statewide Standards-Based Accountability System required districts to have at least one assessment measure in every grade and multiple measures for at least one grade level in each of three specified grade spans. In 1998, the state established statewide criteria for combining multiple measures and required that the SAT-9 be one of the measures used. The PSAA, which replaced the Standards-Based Accountability system, continued the requirement that almost all students be tested with the SAT-9. District-determined multiple measures, however, are no longer required, although the California Department of Education has encouraged districts to continue their use (Eastin, 1999). This section presents the major evaluation findings regarding districts' use of and views about various assessment measures.

- **The SAT-9 is pervasive, but its influence is viewed as highly problematic by many districts and schools.**

Not surprisingly, almost every district included the SAT-9 as one of their assessment measures. Nearly all survey respondents, for example, reported that the SAT-9 is used at one or more grade levels for accountability purposes. Data from other sources supported the survey finding that most districts are indeed using the SAT-9.

As a mandatory, high-stakes test, the SAT-9 exerts considerable influence at the school level, affecting what professional development opportunities are offered and how classroom time is spent on test preparation. At many schools that were visited, the influence of the SAT-9 goes beyond preparing students for the test and extends into the realm of shaping the curriculum itself. Many people who were interviewed spoke of the SAT-9 "driving instruction."

However, the SAT-9 is viewed by district- and school-level personnel as inherently flawed for the following reasons:

The SAT-9, in its current form, is not aligned with state standards. Many district and school staff cited this mismatch as a major flaw of a supposedly standards-based accountability system. As one district survey respondent wrote, "Standardized tests not aligned to standards cause problems in the implementation of the standards."

> ***"Student achievement is being gauged by a test NOT in alignment with State Standards."***
> ***—District Survey Response***
>
> ***"I don't really believe in teaching to a standardized test. I think that too much importance is placed on them. At the same time, I'm tugged in that direction, because everybody thinks it's important. ... So, I have to honor it."***
> ***—Teacher***

The emphasis on the SAT-9 promotes "teaching to the test" — that is, limiting the curriculum to what is on the test. The SAT-9 plays a prominent role in state accountability policy. In fact, it is currently the sole indicator of school performance for the Academic Performance Index (API). As mentioned above, many people who were interviewed suggested that the SAT-9 is driving instruction; not everyone, however, views this as a good thing. For example, one mathematics teacher remarked:

> *I get the impression from state government that we need to teach to the test. I mean, who cares about content anymore in the math class? We teach to the test.*

Similarly, a principal commented that, as teachers teach more and more narrowly to the test, important things may be getting left out of children's education. The lack of alignment between the test and the standards exacerbates this problem: if teachers are teaching to the test and the test does not assess mastery of the standards, then teachers are not teaching to the standards. As one teacher put it:

> *I think the problem we have right now is that the test and the curriculum are based on different standards, and they haven't brought them in line. And I'd like to see the test follow the curriculum — or, decide what the curriculum should be, establish the statewide standards, or national standards, or whatever the heck we're going to use, and then make sure the test follows that. And not the other way around. I don't want a curriculum chasing the test. I want the test to match the standards.*

The "augmented" standards-based items included in the SAT-9 are considered overly difficult and unfair. The state, aware that the basic-skills SAT-9 test provided by the publisher is not aligned with the state standards, commissioned the development of new standards-based, "augmented" items. However, many of these items, which were used for the first time in the

spring of 1999, had technical validity and reliability problems. Moreover, many school-level staff reported in interviews that the augmented items were too difficult for students. One teacher, for example, commented that SAT-9 testing had been "a whole week of upset and tears" for her students, whom she said are among the best at her school. Several teachers did, however, indicate that they were planning to adjust their curriculum to cover the content of the augmented items, suggesting that inclusion of the new items may indeed be spurring teachers to teach to the standards.

The requirement that all students be tested in English is unfair. Several district survey respondents raised concerns about the requirement that all students, especially English language learners, take the SAT-9. People commented that this requirement yields misleading data about student, school, and district performance. As one survey respondent wrote:

> *Requirement to test all Limited English Proficient students in the SAT-9 yield invalid scores (student & school) and thus makes it difficult for us to compare schools since the student populations tested are so different.*

Testing takes valuable time from instruction. Another area of concern with regard to assessment is the amount of class time needed to administer and prepare for tests. (In this respect, the SAT-9 is not the only culprit; other assessments also are responsible.) Several principals and teachers who were interviewed mentioned that too much time was being devoted to testing, and that testing and test preparation were cutting into instructional time.

- **Most districts use and value multiple measures, but fear they will be abandoned because of new state accountability requirements.**

Consistent with state requirements that existed prior to the passage of the PSAA, most districts report using a wide array of multiple measures, including:

- writing samples (86.3% of survey respondents);
- grades (83.2% of survey respondents);
- teacher evaluation/judgments (55% of survey respondents); and
- district criterion-referenced tests (55.7% of survey respondents for English/language arts; 57.3% for mathematics).

Although the use of each of these types of measures may carry its own problems (such as reliability/validity determinations, the expense and time involved in developing local assessments, and the alignment of local measures with content standards), districts voiced strong support for the concept of multiple measures. Many districts even developed multiple measures for every grade level, going beyond the state requirements.

Indeed, districts' support for multiple measures lies behind one of their major criticisms of the centerpiece of the PSAA, the Academic Performance Index (API), which at present relies solely on SAT-9 scores to rank schools. Many district personnel expressed concerns that the state's current emphasis on the SAT-9 — which is not fully aligned to the state standards — as the sole indicator of student performance will lead to the demise of multiple measures and may drive the education system in harmful ways. Survey comments to this effect included:

> *CA swinging back to dependence on standardized test only rather than multiple measures will be devastating.*

> *The new [accountability legislation]...basically does away with multiple measures. The SAT-9 is a snapshot in time whereas multiple measures is accountability system for the entire year.*

Use of Data

Once students complete assessments, whether they are the SAT-9, district-developed assessments, or something else, the results must be analyzed to determine how well students have performed, not only on an individual level but also on classroom, school, subgroup, and district levels. Only when these analyses have occurred can judgments be made about the adequacy of performance at each level. Moreover, assessment results can be used to determine areas of strength and weakness in student performance, and their analysis thus can serve as one step in the process of providing curriculum and instruction to target the weaknesses. All of these analyses, however, require some sophistication in the use of data. Summarized here are the major evaluation findings regarding what data are looked at, by whom, and for what purposes.

- **Districts — perhaps because of capacity factors — report that they are more likely than schools and teachers to analyze and use student performance data.**

According to survey results, district personnel make greater use of data than school level personnel. About 80 percent of survey respondents indicated that district accountability and assessment personnel examine and analyze student assessment data "to a great extent." In contrast, only 33 percent of respondents reported that teachers in their district examine and analyze data "to a great extent."

One explanation for this pattern is that there is greater capacity for data use and analysis at the district level than at the school or classroom level. More than 75 percent of survey respondents rated the capacity to analyze data at the district level as "good" or "very good"; only about 20 percent rated capacity to analyze data at the classroom level as "good" or

> ***"My goal...is that all levels of the system, particularly teachers and administrators, understand the data they get that is provided centrally, know how to supplement it with meaningful data from the site, and know how to use that information on a regular basis to change instruction."***
>
> ***—District Administrator***

"very good." The disaggregation of data by various factors (such as gender and socioeconomic status) is also more likely to occur at district levels than at school or classroom levels. Many districts do, however, recognize the data limitations at the school level and are trying to overcome them by offering school-level personnel professional development opportunities on how to use and analyze data more effectively. Districts' capacity-building efforts regarding use of data were supported both by interview and survey findings.

- **Small districts have inadequate resources to analyze and evaluate data and to assist schools and teachers in using data to improve programs.**

District interviews suggested that district capacity to use and analyze data may be a function of the size of the district. Large districts seem to have the expertise and technology necessary to conduct sophisticated analyses of data, whereas the capacity of smaller districts appears more limited. On the survey, over 60 percent of districts cited needs for professional development in the use of data, better data-use technology, and more staff with evaluation or statistical background.

- **According to districts, engaging in analysis of student assessment data to meet state and federal reporting requirements occurs more frequently than analyzing data to improve instruction.**

Survey results suggested that the satisfaction of reporting requirements constitutes the most prevalent purpose for district-level use of student assessment data. When presented with a number of possible reasons why a district might collect and analyze student assessment data and asked to rate the extent of data use for each one, districts emphasized "to satisfy state and federal reporting requirements" far more than any other listed purpose. Indeed, 96.9 percent of respondents indicated that their district uses data for this purpose either "to great extent" or "to moderate extent."

Other reasons that were rated highly on the survey included the improvement of instruction (cited as "great" or "moderate" by 86.9 percent of respondents), the identification of students needing assistance (82.9%), and the gauging of student subgroup performance across the district (79.2%). Substantial use of data to identify teachers needing assistance was cited by only a few districts; 46.8 percent of districts said that they do not use student assessment data to identify teachers who need assistance *at all*. Similarly, 48.4 percent of districts said that they do not use assessment data to rate or rank district schools.

- **School-level interviews confirmed that teachers are less likely than principals and district administrators to use and analyze student assessment data.**

While districts reported that they are using and analyzing data more than personnel at the school and classroom level, interviews with principals indicated that they are using and analyzing data to a significant, yet varying, degree. Several principals who were interviewed indicated that a substantial amount of data use takes place at the school level. However, teachers who were interviewed rarely mentioned using data at all. Thus it seems likely that data analysis has had little, if any, impact on instruction in most classrooms.

Consequences and Incentives

By some definitions, the very heart of an educational accountability system is consequences. The notion of educational "accountability" implies that someone, somewhere is being held accountable, or responsible, for student achievement and will face consequences if achievement does not rise. Thus, any discussion of accountability is incomplete if it does not include some mention of (a) performance targets for schools, the specific goals that are set for increased achievement, and (b) the consequences for reaching — or not reaching — these targets. This section summarizes the major study findings about what types of performance targets are set by districts and the consequences and incentives districts provide to reach targets.

- **Most districts established performance targets for schools, but their use and approach varied considerably by district.**

Prior to the passage of the PSAA, districts were largely free to establish their own performance targets. Because Title I schools were required to do so, most did: 61.1 percent of district survey respondents reported having Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals for Title I schools. The numbers of non-Title I schools with targets were, unsurprisingly, lower. In fact, over 30 percent of respondents said that their districts set no performance targets for non-Title I schools.

- **Only a few districts offered rewards for good performance, and most districts were only at the beginning stages of thinking through consequences for low school performance.**

On the district survey, only 5.3 percent of respondents said that their districts offered incentives or rewards to individual schools for high student performance or for improving performance. As for consequences for low-performing schools, interviews suggested that

> ***"If we really believe we are a profession that can deliver the goods on student achievement, then we should be willing to accept rewards for success and consequences for failure. We should adopt a no-excuses philosophy....We must be willing to accept responsibility regardless of the background of our students."***
>
> ***—District Administrator***

districts that were instituting such consequences were still in the very early stages of doing so, and there appeared to be different perspectives about the scope and implementation of consequences within and among these districts.

On the survey, districts were more likely to report using some form of supportive intervention for schools than they were to report implementing sanctions. The most frequently cited interventions included the assigning of experts to help schools develop improvement plans, the tailoring of interventions to individual schools, and the provision of professional development opportunities to schools. Only 1 respondent out of 127 indicated school reconstitution as an important district policy for schools with low performance.

- **Principals are more likely than teachers to be held accountable for performance at the school level.**

State policymaker and district interviews both pointed to the principal as the primary person at the school level whose job was on the line for student performance. In many cases, however, the accountability of the principal remained somewhat informal or even hypothetical. In nearly every district where interviews occurred, administrators reported that principals could, in theory, be removed from their positions for accountability reasons *per se*, but none actually had been removed as of the time of the interviews.

Holding teachers accountable was viewed by most people as legally problematic or as too complicated. Teachers who were interviewed were also unclear about whether they were subject to any consequences for low student performance. Even within districts, teachers held differing perceptions about the extent to which they would be held accountable. Several said that they did not know whether they were; others suggested that there were no consequences tied to accountability. As one teacher commented, "Nothing is being done.... There's a greater awareness of what the [test] scores mean, but as far as accountability at a personal level, I don't think there is any."

Two other groups that might be held accountable for academic performance are students themselves and parents. Interviews indicated that students are being held increasingly accountable for their performance through policies prohibiting social promotion or requiring summer school. Parents can be held accountable for student attendance, but not for student achievement. Some districts were experimenting with ways to increase parent involvement.

State policymakers and district administrators who were interviewed acknowledged that, if schools, teachers, and students are going to be held accountable for reaching certain goals, they must be provided with the levels of support necessary to achieve those goals. One district administrator, for example, remarked, "The notion that we're going to punish kids, and hold them over, when they haven't had access to quality instruction, isn't right."

> ***"The pressure to improve test scores has increased while teacher support has not, [leading to] increased anxiety level and low morale."***
>
> ***—District Survey Response***

- **When given the opportunity, districts raised many concerns about the state's new Academic Performance Index ranking system.**

The PSAA introduced a statewide system of ranking schools (the API) and of providing interventions and incentives for schools (the II/USP and the HA/ISP). On the district survey, some respondents indicated a belief that the ranking would be counterproductive, "defeating the goal to improve," as one person put it. Several respondents did not object to ranking schools *per se* but felt that only schools with similar student populations should be compared. "No problem being accountable," wrote one respondent, "Just don't compare schools of high and low SES and high and low LEP counts."

Another concern expressed by some districts about the new legislation is that sanctions involving a change in school staff may exacerbate already-difficult conditions for the lowest performing schools. As one survey respondent said, "I agree with the intent but the playing field is not level. We anticipate changes in administration at schools with high ELL populations due to schools not showing necessary growth. Thus, schools most needing stability will likely go through greatest change."

> ***"I have grave concerns about sanctions for low-performing schools. ... Sanctions will encourage the dedicated experienced teachers to transfer to higher-performing (higher socioeconomic) schools."***
>
> ***—District Survey Response***

Lastly, many districts felt that the goal of five percent growth per year was unrealistic and unfair. A couple of district administrators who were interviewed remarked that achievement does not improve in a constant, linear fashion, but rather occurs in spurts. Schools with achievement that is already high were particularly concerned about showing five percent growth each year.

Impact of Standards-Based Accountability Systems

Because most districts' standards-based accountability systems have been in place for less than two years, it is too early to know for sure what effects, if any, these systems are having on student achievement. Even where evidence of improvement — or, in a few cases, decline — exists, so many different reforms and initiatives have been undertaken simultaneously that one can only speculate about whether the observed changes are attributable to accountability measures.

Although improved student achievement is the most important goal, other outcomes, such as teacher morale, also are important because ultimately they affect student achievement. For these types of outcomes, it may not be too early to expect effects or to infer causality. Presented here is a summary of the study's main findings about the effects of accountability on factors such as policy, practice, achievement, and teacher morale.

- **Districts and schools report that accountability has had positive effects, especially on curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices.**

Both survey results and interviews reveal that district and schools express a cautious optimism about the positive impact of accountability. Representative survey comments about the positive effects of accountability included:

> *Has everyone focused on student learnings and student outcomes.*
>
> *Accountability has brought increased focus on achievement.*
>
> *Accountability has positively impacted how we teach and assess.*

As these comments suggest, many believe that greater accountability has led to a stronger focus on student learning. Over 80 percent of survey respondents reported that accountability has had a positive effect on district-level curriculum and instruction policies and on district-level assessments; 88.6 percent reported a positive effect on curriculum and instruction practices in schools. Over 70 percent of districts surveyed also said that accountability had had a positive effect on classroom assessments.

Moreover, in the opinion of 42.8 percent of survey respondents, their district accountability system or particular accountability components had exercised a positive effect on standardized test scores. Even more powerfully, 64.1 percent of respondents postulated a positive effect on student achievement as measured by other indicators of academic performance.

- **At the same time, districts and schools report that accountability has lowered teacher morale.**

Although most districts that were surveyed reported a positive effect of accountability on most educational areas, over 40 percent of respondents reported that teacher morale had been adversely affected. Many survey respondents commented that teachers are feeling considerable stress and frustration as a result of accountability requirements. Representative comments included:

> *Teachers are anxious about how they will be evaluated and possible job termination if their students' scores are low or do not show growth.*
>
> *Teachers are feeling tremendous pressure to succeed with every student even though many factors of student performance are not in their control.*
>
> *Teachers are feeling overwhelmed by the number of changes which have contributed to some expressions of frustration and inability to feel they are keeping up with expectations.*

Some school-level staff — principals and teachers — echoed these concerns in interviews. "I am really frustrated by it all," said one teacher.

However, accountability does not necessarily affect all teachers negatively. Some interviewed teachers did make positive remarks about accountability and even about being held accountable, and several district survey respondents also commented that accountability had exercised a positive effect on teachers or on classroom instruction. Such survey comments included:

> *Teachers always enjoy meeting to set directions in their subject area. Assessing these areas of direction gives them feedback that they haven't had in the past — they like knowing how their efforts are paying off.*
>
> *Teachers understand the target and can now make sure students are prepared.*
>
> *Accountability is a role that the teachers and administration welcome — creating a positive direction for all staff, parents, and students.*

Challenges and Assistance

The development and implementation of an accountability system is by no means a simple, straightforward task. Many challenges present themselves along the way. For example, not only must the system be designed in ways that are likely help raise student achievement —

a difficult charge even under the best of circumstances — but it must be designed and implemented within the constraints of available time and resources. The nascent system must also be coordinated with other existing or emerging policies, programs, and initiatives. Moreover, the effectiveness of the system will rely on broad support and buy-in from multiple stakeholders. This section summarizes districts' comments about these challenges and others they have faced, as well as what they have found and would find helpful in responding to the challenges they face.

- **Many district officials expressed frustration and confusion about the lack of a consistent, coherent, and fair statewide reform agenda.**

In interviews and survey comments, district administrators expressed great concern about their ability to keep up with the rapidly changing set of reforms initiated at the state level. The addition of new requirements without the elimination of older ones causes a strain on districts, and it also sends mixed messages about what is important. Further, district and school personnel are frustrated by the frequent changes in state requirements and the lack of coordination between different state initiatives. State level "practices" that survey respondents mentioned as having hindered their district in accountability development included the following:

> *Lack of consistent requirements—we need a sustained focus over enough time to yield meaningful information.*
>
> *Inability of state to evaluate and adopt a system that is consistent, based on proven implementation, with professional development attached.*
>
> *Constantly changing state legislation.*
>
> *State system not consistent year to year.*

Moreover, nearly 60 percent of district survey respondents said that they do not believe that the expectations and requirements for districts with regard to accountability are fair and reasonable. The sources of "unfairness" cited by many districts included the use of a norm-referenced test to measure mastery of content standards, lack of consistency and coordination at the state level, unrealistic state expectations for student achievement, and inattention to issues of equity.

- **Districts have faced many specific challenges in developing and implementing key components of an accountability system.**

Over 50 percent of survey respondents indicated each of the following as one of their district's top five challenges in developing and implementing an accountability system:

- aligning curriculum, instruction, assessment, and content standards
- dealing with limited resources (time, staff, financial support)
- finding or developing valid and reliable forms of assessment

Ensuring equity of the system for all schools and populations subgroups was another frequently noted challenge on the survey, as was implementing professional development for teachers in the use of content standards. District interviews suggested that yet another key challenge is gaining buy-in from teachers and others at the school level so that reforms are actually implemented. Districts also indicated both on the survey and in interviews that communication-related issues, such as lack of clarity in state directives and delayed information, have created challenges for them. Limited resources, too, appear to have been an issue with many districts — and at the state level.

The challenges presented by the PSAA more or less parallel the more general concerns held by districts. For example, many districts raised questions about the time and resources needed to implement the new policy (especially in conjunction with other requirements) and about the level of coordination between the PSAA and other initiatives. Representative survey comments included:

> *Having one accountability/assessment package that is coordinated is much preferable to a piecemeal approach. We are concerned that the popularity of this hot initiative (assessment/accountability) will result in a flurry of sometimes conflicting expectations…not supported with resources, and nothing else has gone away, so it has added another layer of tasks.*
>
> *It seems to be coming down to the local level at a fast and furious pace. It is difficult to thoughtfully implement new policies and programs and accountability measures given quick turnaround time.*

Although most districts indicated that they would make a good faith effort to abide by the new system, many indicated that they need time and resources to determine what strategies are best to remedy problems identified by accountability measures.

- **Districts have received assistance from a wide range of organizations in the development of their standards-based accountability systems.**

Districts turned to a variety of organizations for help in implementing their standards-based accountability systems. Many districts (63.2%) reported that they have received assistance from the California Department of Education in developing, implementing, and refining their accountability systems. Other frequently cited sources for support included county offices of education (marked by 69.2% of survey respondents), other districts (51.9%), professional consultants (40.6%), and the Statewide System of School Support (32.3%). Districts were particularly positive about the assistance and documents they received related to content standards and multiple measures.

- **Districts would like further assistance related to accountability.**

When asked, "Would you or others from your district like to have an opportunity for more professional development related to standards-based accountability?" over 80 percent of survey respondents answered in the affirmative. The types of professional development desired were quite varied; areas that were identified particularly often included the development of assessments and the alignment of assessments, standards, curriculum and instruction. Another area in which many districts requested assistance was in the analysis and use of student assessment data; the phrases "analyzing data" and "data analysis" appeared again and again in districts' written survey comments about what types of professional development they would find helpful.

Improvement of school and student performance and "putting the pieces together" were other areas in which districts requested assistance, perhaps through networking with other districts. Districts would like concrete, specific, proven strategies, especially ones to use with low-performing schools and students, as indicated by the following survey comments:

> *More workshops highlighting best practices.*
>
> *SOLID RESEARCH ON WHAT REALLY WORKS for improvement.*
>
> *Models of systems employed by districts of a similar size and with limited district office staff.*
>
> *Putting-all-the-pieces together ideas from successful systems.*

Increased resources and greater stability and consistency of state policy also appeared on the "wish list" of many districts.

Implications and Recommendations

Overall, the study revealed a high degree of buy-in and commitment to the concept of accountability up and down the educational ladder in California. District administrators, principals, and teachers know and accept the need to be accountable for improving student achievement. Nevertheless, many districts have experienced considerable frustration over various aspects of the implementation of the state accountability initiatives. This section outlines the general and specific recommendations that emerge from the study's findings.

- **For accountability to be effective, it must be systemic and coherent in nature, and it must be clearly communicated at all levels of the educational system.**

It is not enough for individual pieces of accountability to be present — they must reinforce and align with one another. Much more work is needed in California before such an accountability system is complete and leads to improved student performance in a way that is consistent with state academic standards.

To have such an effect, state content standards must be aligned with local standards, which must in turn be aligned with performance standards. Curriculum frameworks, assessments, instructional materials, professional development, and even teacher preparation programs all must be consistent with the standards. These and other components must be appropriately aligned throughout the system — all the way from the policymakers in Sacramento to each classroom teacher. In California, however, many of these elements have not as yet been fully developed, nor are they coordinated with one another. Furthermore, the loose coupling between state policy and local implementation by teachers poses a significant challenge to the effectiveness of the accountability system.

Clear communication and consistent messages about accountability at all levels of the educational system — from the state to the district to the school to the classroom — would also increase the positive impact of accountability on student performance. The public and those at the local level would benefit from a clearer understanding of what accountability *is*, how it is supposed to work, what its components are, and how the components are interrelated. In particular, clear communications about what is expected must reach the level of the classroom for accountability to help raise student achievement.

In addition, greater stability in policy at the state level would facilitate the implementation of accountability at the local level. If policy changes are necessary, they should be based on evidence collected from those who are most affected, namely local administrators, educators, and students. California has frequently changed direction, adopting one reform after the next without allowing sufficient time to fully implement or evaluate any — much to the frustration of district personnel. If California is to have an accountability system that enhances student achievement in the right direction, it must continue to strive for a standards-based, stable, and consistent approach, and send clear signals to districts and schools.

For the most part, California should "stay the course" with developing the existing components of its accountability infrastructure: standards, assessment, and a system of interventions, rewards, and sanctions. However, no approach is perfect from the start. Modifications may be necessary to rectify unintended consequences and ensure the system is meeting its primary objective. The caveat is that *any changes should be informed by systematically collected evidence from the local level* about what is working or not working and why.

Recommendations on Coherence and Communication for Accountability

1. *Alignment Inventory*
   An outside independent group should conduct a periodic "alignment inventory" of current state education policies. This group should examine the status of development and the degree of coherence among the several legislatively-mandated components of the current accountability system. This review would include a *horizontal* analysis of key state policies, such as PSAA (SB X1), STAR (AB 265), High School Exit Exam (SBX 2), and the various other state curriculum and instruction and professional development initiatives. A *vertical* analysis, examining how well such policies are communicated and implemented from the state, to districts, to schools, to the classroom level should also be part of this inventory. The appointment of the outside body, which should report its findings on an ongoing, regular basis to CDE and to the State Board of Education, the Legislature, and the Governor, should be one of the first charges to the Accountability unit within CDE.

2. *Accountability Evaluation*
   The Governor and the Legislature should adequately fund the evaluation currently mandated by the PSAA in order to provide a comprehensive, rigorous look at the effects of the new accountability program. This evaluation of the PSAA would serve as an important source of information on how well accountability policies are understood, implemented, and used to facilitate change in classroom teaching and to improve student outcomes in desirable directions. Adequately funded, the evaluation could help ensure the availability of rigorous and generalizable information to inform policymakers about any modifications necessary to the existing accountability system. The evaluation should pay close attention to matters of equity, such as the impact of the accountability system on student subgroup populations and schools in a wide range of settings.

3. *Use of the World Wide Web*
   CDE and the State Board should continue to ramp up their use of the World Wide Web in communicating accountability policy to all stakeholders within the system, from district personnel to teachers to parents to the general public. Since the enactment of the PSAA, the Web has served as an invaluable communication resource. Further development and resources should be spent on updating and making more comprehensive the PSAA and STAR portions of the CDE Web site. The "alignment inventory" could also be housed on the CDE Web site as a way of providing local districts and educators with the "big picture" perspective on the status, interrelationship, and alignment of various components of the state's accountability, assessment, and standards policies. In addition, some state and district resources should be focused on ensuring that teachers are familiar with the Web site, have easy access to it, and use it routinely.

- **Assessments for accountability purposes should measure student progress toward content standards; if they do not, they will divert attention *away* from content standards.**

Ideally, in a completely articulated standards-based accountability system, schools should focus on teaching curriculum based on content standards, and assessments should merely be a measure of how well students have mastered the standards. However, the findings of this evaluation clearly demonstrate that, as a mandatory, high-stakes test, the SAT-9 often drives curriculum and instruction practices to a much greater extent than the content standards *per se*.

This is not surprising, given the state's emphasis on assessment. And were the SAT-9 fully aligned with the content standards, the emphasis on the test might help bring about the desired effect of student mastery of the standards. Yet there are serious concerns about the extent to which the SAT-9, even with its augmented sections, is aligned with the standards. Even should scores on the SAT-9 rise significantly over the next few years, an important question would be whether the rise is truly indicative of the type of student improvement desired.

Recommendations on Assessment for Accountability

4. *Standards-Based Assessments*
   If content and performance standards are to be the drivers of the accountability system, standards-based assessments must be developed as quickly and carefully as possible. It is essential that assessments used for accountability purposes, whether the augmented SAT-9 or a matrix test, reflect the state standards. The Governor and the Legislature should provide adequate resources to develop such standards-based assessments as quickly as possible without jeopardizing their validity and reliability. The development of the standards-based assessments should include the input of educators, and, when completed, the assessments should be carefully field-tested.

5. *Inclusion of Standards-Based Assessments in the Academic Performance Index*
   As soon as valid and reliable standards-based assessments are available, the Academic Performance Index (API) should include them. As the development of the API proceeds, the addition of other valid and reliable measures will help ensure that schools are not being ranked based only on one, narrow indicator of performance — at present, the basic-skills test items of the SAT-9. As with other accountability components, the critical variable is resources; to do this quickly without compromising quality will be expensive. Cutting corners to limit the amount of money spent or extending the timeline risks having a state accountability system that is driven by an

indicator of performance that is not consistent with state standards or a comprehensive definition of school performance.

6. *Statewide Student Information System*
The Governor and the Legislature should expedite and fully fund the development of the California School Information Services (CSIS) to facilitate the inclusion of reliable comprehensive measures, such as attendance and graduation rates, in the API. Such a statewide student information system would benefit all districts, but smaller districts in particular, by providing the infrastructure necessary to collect reliable data on attendance and graduation rates, track students who change schools, and so on. Although expensive initially, it is likely that a statewide data system would actually be more cost-effective than the current approach, in which individual districts struggle to design their own systems. In the short term, as the system is being developed, the state should provide additional support, such as an optional data service funded through a combination of state and local contributions, to small and medium-sized districts.

- **Accountability measures should be accompanied by capacity-building activities, such as professional development for teachers on teaching to content standards and for teachers and administrators on using data to improve instruction.**

While a set of strong, standards-aligned assessments would go a long way toward improving instruction and student performance in the desired directions, they would be bolstered by additional capacity-building activities. In particular, professional development around how to teach to content standards and how to use assessment data to inform classroom practices would strengthen accountability efforts.

While most districts do offer some professional development on content standards for teachers, the current offerings appear limited. Current state-level efforts to link professional development to content standards are clearly needed, and their continued existence should be encouraged. Additional support and resources for this professional development would be invaluable in moving California toward high standards for all students.

Another area requiring significant capacity-building attention is the analysis and use of data. Professional development around the use of data for people at every level of the system — district administrators, school administrators, and teachers — is necessary for accountability to have its maximal impact. The use of data to improve instruction — and ultimately improve student achievement — is a resource of tremendous potential value that, as yet, has largely been untapped. Moreover, the new, complex formulas used for the API and the implications of using test results to determine rewards and sanctions will require

unprecedented levels of understanding among state-, district-, and school-level personnel if they are to appropriately employ the formulas and interpret their implications.

Recommendations on Capacity Building for Accountability

7. *Professional Development for Teachers in Content Standards*
   Local school districts should ensure that professional development programs are aimed at building teacher knowledge and skills related to content standards. These programs should be adequately funded and sustained over time; district priorities for professional development might need to be examined. In addition, teachers must have adequate time to participate in these opportunities.

8. *Capacity Building for Accountability-Related Data Analysis*
   The Governor and the Legislature should fund capacity-building opportunities for teachers and administrators to learn about analyzing data to improve student achievement and school performance. CDE should serve as a broker for these services and provide statewide uniformity and quality control for them. The county offices and superintendents should serve as regional resources for this training.

9. *Clearinghouse of Exemplary Practices*
   The Governor and the Legislature should fund the development of a Clearinghouse of exemplary accountability practices developed by districts and schools for raising student achievement. The Clearinghouse, which would be accessible through the Web, would feature information about practices from districts that have shown a successful grasp of implementing accountability at the local level. Through the Clearinghouse, districts and schools would be able to find out about "best practices" that were successful in settings and with student populations similar to their own.

10. *Inclusion of Accountability-Related Topics in Teacher Preparation Programs*
    The California State University and University of California teacher preparation programs should specifically address issues related to accountability. These issues include teaching to content standards and using data from accountability mechanisms to improve instruction.

Conclusion

At its current stage of development, the concept of standards-based accountability enjoys considerable support in California as a reform strategy. However, the sense of optimism about its effectiveness is jarred by the reality of implementation. Accountability has proven to be a complicated task and that complexity is exacerbated by the compressed time frame in which it has been implemented. As one district Superintendent put it, "We are training for a marathon and asked to do 100-yard sprints!" The early timing of this evaluation in the long-term development process cannot be emphasized enough. It will be several years before a fully developed accountability system can be expected to have widespread, positive impact.

The recommendations generated from this evaluation are few in number, but all are important. They have implications and responsibilities for all the actors in education in California: the State Board of Education, the Governor, the Legislature, local districts, county offices of education, superintendents, and the CSU and UC teacher education programs. Some of the activities mentioned in the recommendations are already underway, but accountability brings a heightened emphasis to them.

The overarching recommendation from this report is the following:

> *Step Back, Review, and Align*
> **Political leaders and educators need to step back, review where the California educational system is, align what already exists, and resist the temptation to move forward with new initiatives.**

The authors of this report believe that attention to the issues raised by this evaluation will help bring about a coherent, cohesive accountability system that can help improve the achievement of all of California's children.

Chapter 1
Introduction

Study Background and Purpose

In the spring of 1998, the California Department of Education (CDE) awarded a contract to WestEd, in collaboration with Management Analysis and Planning, Inc. (MAP) to evaluate standards-based accountability in California. The evaluation was to examine the processes and impact of the state's Standards-Based Accountability System in school districts across the state and the relationship of this system to school district efforts to improve student performance through accountability measures. Although the evaluation was initially slated to be conducted over three years, from June 1998 through June 2001, lack of funding at the state level caused the study period to be shortened to one year, ending in November 1999. The findings of the study and its implications for policy are reported in this document.

California's Standards-Based Accountability System was established in 1997 by CDE in response to federal requirements of Title I of the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), and in accordance with the state's IASA plan. The Standards-Based Accountability program was largely a system of locally defined programs. Districts were expected to develop and adopt local content and performance standards (comparable to state standards) and to use multiple assessment measures to determine whether students were meeting the local standards. As part of the state's Consolidated Application for Funding Categorical Aid Programs, Part II, districts were required to report on the progress of their standards-based accountability systems. In particular, districts were to include a description of their accountability and assessment system along with student achievement data for all schools within the district. (McKenna, 1997 and 1998; Fausset, 1998).

Significant events occurred during the course of the study which have some bearing on its implications. In April of 1999, the legislature enacted and the governor signed a new state-driven accountability program, the Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA) of 1999. This new law essentially replaced the program that this study was in the midst of evaluating. Districts still have the option to continue developing their own standards-based systems, but they will no longer be required by the state to use multiple measures or to submit accountability reporting information as part of the Consolidated Application. This change in law meant that, as data were being collected from the field on accountability, much of the information reported by district and school personnel reflected not only the progress to date on the pre-existing program, but also their concerns about the implications of the PSAA.

As such, although the study was originally charged to examine a program that is now transitioning to the new PSAA legislation, its findings are still relevant. As described in this report, the implications of this study are important for the state's consideration as it moves forward in implementing the requirements of PSAA.

Study Questions

This study focused on the following major research questions relating to standards-based accountability:

1. At what stage or level are districts in planning and implementing their standards-based accountability systems?
2. What is the nature of local content and performance standards in language arts and mathematics and how do they compare with the state standards? What mechanism does the district use to compare its standards with the state's model standards?
3. To what degree have district standards been implemented in schools? At what stage or level are districts and schools in planning and implementing the district standards?
4. What is the nature of local assessments for standards-based accountability and how are they used to determine whether a student has met or has not met the local standards?
5. How are data from local accountability systems used?
6. What types of performance targets do districts set for schools?
7. What types of incentives do districts provide for schools to meet their targets? What consequences do schools face if they do not meet the targets?
8. What practices or features of a district's standards and accountability system are associated with particular educational outcomes and practices?

9. What practices of the state education agency and other education-related institutions and assistance centers help or hinder districts in implementing their standards and accountability systems?[1]

10. What obstacles do districts face in implementing a standards-based accountability system and how can the state education agency and other educational institutions and assistance centers help districts in overcoming those obstacles?

These questions are addressed in Chapters 5–11 of this report, as described in Figure 1.1. In addition, other sections of the report discuss the changing educational and political context for this evaluation (Chapter 2), the conceptual framework that served as a lens through which to view accountability (Chapter 3), the methodology and data sources employed by the evaluation (Chapter 4), and recommendations and conclusions (Chapter 12). The Appendix contains the instruments and protocols that were used.

Figure 1.1

Table Linking Study Questions to Report Chapters

Study Question	Chapter in Which Question is Addressed
1. At what stage or level are districts in planning and implementing their standards-based accountability systems?	Chapter 5, "The Status of Local Accountability Systems"
2. What is the nature of local content and performance standards in language arts and mathematics and how do they compare with the state standards? What mechanism does the district use to compare its standards with the state's model standards?	Chapter 6, "Content Standards"
3. To what degree have district standards been implemented in schools? At what stage or level are districts and schools in planning and implementing the district standards?	Chapter 6, "Content Standards"

[1] This question, #9, and the following question, #10, were originally framed around assistance to and obstacles for schools, rather than districts. Because a major data collection at the school level was not possible within the constraints of this evaluation, and because local standards-based accountability systems were districtwide rather than school-based, both questions were reshaped to focus on the district as the primary unit of analysis.

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Study Question	Chapter in Which Question is Addressed
4. What is the nature of local assessments for standards-based accountability and how are they used to determine whether a student has met or has not met the local standards?	Chapter 7, "Assessment Measures"
5. How are data from local accountability systems used?	Chapter 8, "Use of Data"
6. What types of performance targets do districts set for schools?	Chapter 9, "Consequences and Incentives"
7. What types of incentives do districts provide for schools to meet their targets? What consequences do schools face if they do not meet the targets?	Chapter 9, "Consequences and Incentives"
8. What practices or features of a district's standards and accountability system are associated with particular educational outcomes and practices?	Chapter 10, "Impact of Standards-Based Accountability Systems"
9. What practices of the state education agency and other education-related institutions and assistance centers help or hinder districts in implementing their standards and accountability systems?	Chapter 11, "Challenges and Assistance"
10. What obstacles do districts face in implementing a standards-based accountability system and how can the state education agency and other educational institutions and assistance centers help districts in overcoming those obstacles?	Chapter 11, "Challenges and Assistance"

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Chapter 2

Context for This Evaluation

Overview

California's evolution toward creating a standards-based accountability system is complex and ongoing. This complicated history, summarized in this chapter, provides a critical context for understanding the findings and perspectives presented in subsequent chapters.

Just as this evaluation was beginning, California was at the threshold of embarking on an ambitious accountability agenda. The call for greater accountability in education has been growing for several years, propelled by several overlapping and interrelated initiatives at federal, state, and local levels.

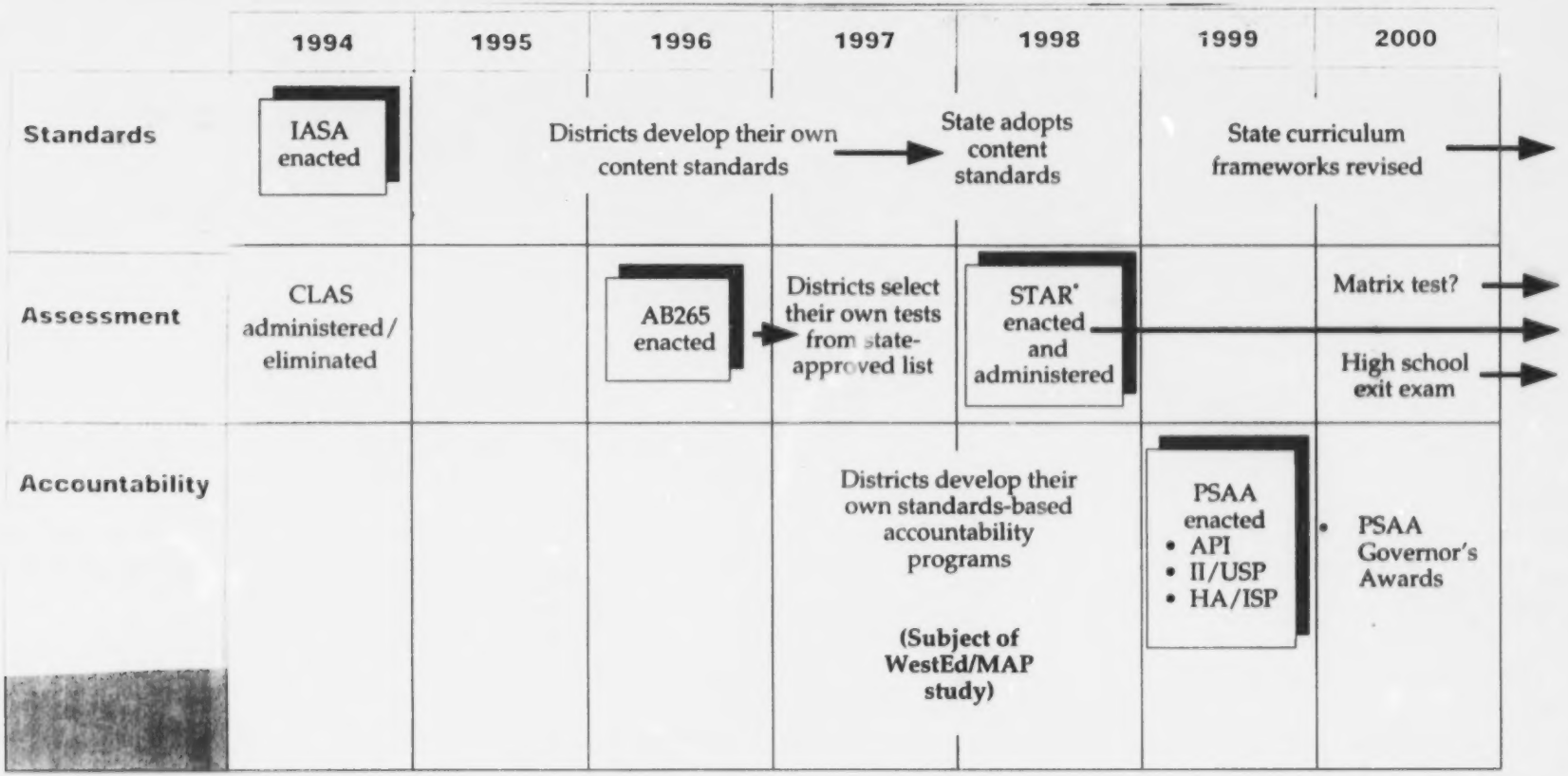
At the federal level, national leaders in the early 1990s called on states to create a voluntary system of standards. Laws passed by Congress, such as the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) of 1994, promoted the establishment of standards-based assistance and performance goals for schools serving low-income and other special-needs students. These federal initiatives encouraged states, including California, to continue their efforts to create statewide infrastructures of aligned standards and assessments to guide district and school improvement. This approach was commonly referred to as systemic reform (O'Day & Smith, 1993).

Some states went a few steps beyond creating state standards and assessments. Kentucky, Texas, North Carolina, and Maryland, for example, initiated high-stakes testing tied to rewards and sanctions programs designed to provide schools with incentives to improve performance results (Elmore, Abelmann, & Fuhrmann, 1996).

At the local level, large urban districts across the country, most notably Chicago and Philadelphia, pursued similar approaches to turning around chronically low-performing schools in the mid 1990s. Likewise, in the late 1990s, a handful of California districts, including some of its largest urban districts, were at varying stages of implementing incentive-based accountability plans that included sanctions.

In April of 1999, California legislators and Governor Gray Davis passed their version of a high-stakes, incentives-based accountability system, the Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA). Unprecedented, the law signals the first time that schools will be publicly ranked based on a performance index with some schools facing serious consequences for continued poor performance and others receiving rewards for demonstrating progress.

Figure 2.1
Timeline of Accountability in California



* Single state test (SAT-9) for all school districts.

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The Evolution of Standards and Accountability System at the State Level: 1994–1999

California's Early Experience Filled with False Starts. Nationwide, states have spent the latter half of the past decade constructing a state framework for improving schools: setting standards, establishing compatible tests, building educator capacity through professional development, and, in fewer instances, outlining a series of incentives for schools in reaching new standards (CCSSO, 1998; ECS, 1997). Similar to the experiences of other states, California's construction of such a standards-based accountability infrastructure has been slow, incremental, and non-sequential — that is, not all components are developed in concert with each other or in a logically linear way (Massell, Kirst, & Hoppe, 1997; District & School Support Division, CDE, 1998). Competing or conflicting mandates, sometimes the result of turnover in gubernatorial and legislative leadership, have often thwarted coherent and continuous reform. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 11, this situation has led to mixed messages, frustrating and lowering the morale of districts and school personnel.

First Attempt at Performance-Based Testing Abandoned. In the early 1990s, California was championed by some as having a prototypical "systemic" or standards-driven education system (O'Day & Smith, 1993). But by the mid-90s, California's reputation as trailblazer in this area had suffered some serious setbacks. Most significant was the demise of the state's first performance-based assessment system, the California Learning Assessment System (CLAS), specifically designed to measure students' mastery of curriculum laid out in state frameworks. In 1994, after just one year, the test was abandoned for a combination of political, technical, and ideological reasons (Kirst & Mazzeo, 1996).

State Calls for Creation of State Standards and a Voluntary Assessment Program. In 1995, policymakers resumed efforts to create a statewide system of standards, curriculum, and assessments. During that year, the state enacted the California Assessment of Academic Achievement Act (AB 265). That law established the Commission for the Establishment of Academic Content and Performance Standards, charged with developing "rigorous content and performance standards" for Kindergarten and grades 1–12.

AB 265 also provided districts with incentive funding to participate in a voluntary, locally administered testing program. Under this program, districts were eligible to receive funding for administering their own tests as long as the tests were selected from a state-approved list. Considered transitional in nature, this testing program was to operate until state content and performance standards were adopted and a standards-based test could be developed.

After extensive deliberation and debate, content standards were adopted by the State Board of Education close to schedule between November 1997 and July 1998. The extent to which

districts have adopted the state standards, or have developed their own local standards that are aligned with the state standards, is discussed in Chapter 6.

Status of Standards-Based Assessments in Flux. While progress has been made in the adoption of state content standards, progress on statewide performance standards and a standards-based test has been slow. Originally mandated for completion by this year, that target date for the development of state performance standards is currently being reconsidered by the legislature. Performance standards are viewed by some as critical to the development of a standards-based assessment system.

Also in flux is the development of the standards-based California Assessment of Applied Academic Skills (CAAAS), referred to as the "matrix test," authorized as part of AB 265. It is supposed to provide policymakers with an in-depth view of how well students perform across the breadth and depth of the state's academic standards. The test will not be administered to all students — only grades 4, 5, 8, and 10 will be tested in specified content areas.

A complicating factor in the development of this standards-based test was the somewhat sudden enactment of a new testing program (SB 376) in 1997, the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program. Concerned by the lack of a statewide, comparable measure of academic performance for schools and districts that could report individual scores for all students, former Governor Pete Wilson and legislators jumped ahead with STAR to address these issues.

New Statewide Assessment System Replaces Voluntary Local Testing Program. STAR, which replaced the transitional voluntary local testing program authorized under AB 265, requires all districts to administer the same nationally normed, "off-the-shelf," basic-skills, standardized test. The test selected as the centerpiece of the STAR program was the SAT-9 (Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition, Form T), published by Harcourt Brace Educational Measurement. Under the STAR program, virtually all students are tested every spring in grades 2–11, including students with limited English proficiency.

The program, now entering its third year of administration, has a second component — an augmentation that is designed to be keyed to the state standards with multiple-choice, standards-related items. However, the full augmentation for all grades in all subject matter areas may not be completed for several years.

STAR also has a third component, designed to address English language development issues. Although all students must take the SAT-9 regardless of their English-speaking ability, students who are non-English speaking must also be tested in their native language if they have been enrolled in California schools for up to a year and a test is available in that

language. Currently the Spanish Assessment of Basic Education, Second Edition (SABE/2) is the only non-English test authorized to be used for this purpose.

The norm-referenced SAT-9 portion of STAR is now the linchpin of the state's new accountability law, PSAA. Until other indicators of academic performance are deemed valid and reliable, the SAT-9 is the sole indicator currently being used in an index that will help to rank schools' performance and determine their eligibility for an intervention and rewards program.

Unclear is whether attaching high stakes to such a test may drive teachers to "drill and practice" techniques on a narrow subset of skills or eventually lead to a stronger focus on standards-based skill development. These fears were expressed by district and school personnel in surveys and interviews, as discussed in Chapter 7. Another concern is the future and role of the previously mandated (AB 265) standards-based matrix test. In October 1999, the State Board of Education voted to delay, perhaps indefinitely, the issuance of the contract to develop the assessment.

Evolution of Locally Developed, Standard-Based Accountability Program: 1995–1999

While California state policymakers spent the latter half of the 1990s deliberating over the direction and design of a standards-based accountability framework, many local districts had moved forward with the implementation of their own locally developed accountability plans. The impetus for these locally developed initiatives stemmed from several sources.

One push for standards came from districts and schools themselves. A handful of districts and schools created standards and aligned assessments from scratch. Throughout the mid-90s, a number of districts and schools joined increasingly popular reform networks (e.g., Coalition of Essential Schools, Success for All, and the New Standards Project), many of which promoted school improvement models that embraced elements of standards-based reform. Another set of districts in large urban areas, which faced a persistent achievement gap between high- and low-performing schools, went even further, creating accountability mechanisms tied to standards and assessments.

CDE-Led Initiatives. CDE also encouraged the development of a standards-based accountability program. In a program called the Challenge Initiative, initiated by the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Delaine Eastin, a network of districts was launched in 1995. In exchange for greater flexibility (e.g., CDE supported districts who asked for waivers), Challenge districts were supposed to implement a comprehensive program that included setting high standards, developing accountability systems to measure student

performance, and reporting district progress toward specific growth targets. As of November of 1997, 57 districts and 632 schools were part of the Challenge Initiative.

Federally Influenced Initiatives. Perhaps most influential in prompting standards-based accountability at the local level were the requirements associated with the federal government's largest K–12 education program, IASA. That law, passed in 1994, called on states to develop a standards-based approach to monitoring the performance of Title I schools and for identifying low-performing Title I schools in need of improvement.

Accordingly, CDE included in their IASA state plan to the U.S. Department of Education a new, locally developed, Standards-Based Accountability System. That program, which began in the 1997–98 school year, required participating districts to develop standards for all students, to use reliable and valid multiple measures of assessment, and to disaggregate results by student group.

The Standards-Based Accountability System was largely designed as a reporting mechanism for CDE. In short, districts with Title I schools had to submit in their Consolidated Application for Funding Categorical Aid Programs, Part II, information about the status of their standards-based accountability plans and school level reports of student achievement. (The relevant pages of the Consolidated Application are included in the Appendix.) Districts due to participate in the state's Coordinated Compliance Review (a program monitoring process) and schools applying for special Distinguished School or National Blue Ribbon awards status also were expected to submit this information to CDE. To support districts in their efforts to meet new requirements, CDE issued extensive memoranda and offered trainings on elements of standards-based accountability, with a special emphasis on how to combine multiple measures to determine student proficiency in meeting standards (McKenna, 1997 & 1998; Fausset, 1998).

The implementation and impact of this locally targeted, reporting-centered Standards-Based Accountability System were to constitute the primary focus of this evaluation. However, due to the passage of a sweeping new state accountability program (PSAA), districts were inclined to want to comment on the far-reaching implications of this new law on their local reform efforts.

The State Adds Interventions and Incentives in a New Statewide Accountability Program: 1999

Locally Developed Programs Were Already Underway When the State Passed Its Accountability Initiative. Chronologically, some districts' efforts preceded state efforts to create standards-based accountability systems. In particular, some districts were grappling with adopting

content and performance standards by the time the state adopted standards in late 1997/early 1998 and were experimenting with multiple assessment measures when STAR was administered for the first time in 1998.

Likewise, a handful of districts were already moving forward with incentives-based accountability plans, when a legislatively created (SB 1570), broad-based advisory committee was issuing recommendations to policymakers about the need for a state interventions and rewards system. The committee's report, *Steering By Results* (Office of Policy & Evaluation, CDE, 1997), then served as the basis for bills in the next two legislative sessions. The first legislative proposal was passed by the legislature in 1998, but was vetoed by then-Governor Pete Wilson because it was perceived as not having enough teeth.

New Elements Added to Complete California's Accountability System. In 1999, the legislature and newly elected Governor Gray Davis succeeded in the enactment of the second legislative proposal, SBX1, the Public School Accountability Act (PSAA). PSAA called for the creation of three basic components: 1) an index to rank the performance of schools, 2) an assistance and intervention program for schools who fall below expectations, and 3) a rewards program for schools who exceed them. The law also mandated the creation of a broad-based advisory group to guide implementation decisions and an ongoing evaluation of the law's impact.

With the passage of this new law, California followed the cue of a growing number of other states that are now using interventions and rewards programs for schools that fail, meet, or exceed performance expectations (Edwards, 1999). For the first time in the state's history, public schools are operating under a high-stakes testing and accountability system that defines a sequence of events and consequences for schools that continue to fall below expectations. The hope is that such a system will force schools to focus on improving academic results — thereby raising the performance of all students.

While the law is fairly specific about what happens to schools when they fail to meet expectations, many complicated implementation details are still undecided and are currently the source of deliberation and debate at the state level. Chief among them are issues pertaining to the design of the Academic Performance Index (API) — the primary mechanism to be used in ranking schools and measuring their performance growth over time.

Of particular uncertainty is the composition of the API. Initially the law called for multiple indicators including the results of the augmented portions of STAR, the "matrix" standards-based test, and student and school personnel attendance rates. However, such indicators are either still under development or have not demonstrated reliability or validity and are unlikely to be part of the index for at least a couple of years.

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As such, the API currently consists of the norm-referenced STAR test as the sole criterion for performance. For districts, which have devoted the last few years to developing multiple-measures for performance, a narrowly based index seems to conflict with prior efforts. This issue was raised by many district and school personnel, as discussed in Chapter 7.

Another key part of the new system is a program designed to assist and intervene when schools fail to show improvement, called the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP). This program, which allows schools to volunteer (or in some cases, to be randomly selected) to participate, provides school improvement funds and the assistance of an external evaluator who works in concert with a community-school team. If growth targets are not met in twelve months following the implementation of a school improvement plan, local interventions, possibly including reassignment of school staff, will take place. If no substantial progress is made by the second year, state interventions including the takeover of the governance of the school by the state Superintendent of Instruction or some other entity may occur.

Accountability in California Still a Work in Progress — Impact May Not Be Seen for Several Years

In summary, California's experience with state-mandated accountability has just begun. Unclear is how the new state framework for accountability will work in relation to efforts already underway at the local level. Will it eclipse them? Will it complement them? Another uncertainty is whether a high-stakes testing and accountability system will bring about desired results. Are higher test scores on a basic-skills test all that is expected? What is an accurate measure or assessment of whether the state is making progress in teaching all students state content standards? How long will it take before the state has an aligned standards-based accountability system and what will happen in the interim?

Although the groundwork for a statewide system of standards has been laid, how well the state's assessment and accountability system will act as a lever for inducing districts and schools to implement such standards is still a question. Questions regarding the new state system were beyond the scope of this evaluation, whose primary subject was the previous system. Nevertheless, the findings presented in this report remain relevant even in the changing context of state accountability and can help to shed light on the successes and challenges encountered in the implementation of the new system.

In the Next Chapter

In this chapter, the recent historical background of educational accountability in California has been traced. The next chapter returns to the theme of standards-based accountability by outlining the research background and detailing a generalized conceptual framework for accountability systems.

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Chapter 3

Conceptual Framework

To explore the study questions outlined in the Introduction, the research team developed a conceptual framework as a representation of a strong and meaningful accountability system and as a lens through which to view existing accountability efforts. This framework was based on a review of research on effective state and local accountability systems (Elmore et al., 1996; Goertz, Floden, & O'Day, 1995; Massell et al.,1997; Clotfelter & Ladd, 1996; Newmann, King, & Rigdon, 1997; Adams & Kirst, 1998).

Of crucial importance in the design of the framework was the idea of a cohesive, comprehensive accountability *system*. If an accountability system is to be truly effective, its components must be coordinated so that they can work in concert with one another to produce the desired outcomes. Individual components standing alone or unconnected with other initiatives will be of limited effect.

For example, assessment in and of itself does not constitute a standards-based accountability system, although it is certainly one critical component. For one thing, assessments must be aligned with content standards and designed to measure progress toward them. Moreover, a strong accountability system must work to build the capacity of teachers to implement content standards at the classroom level and should include incentives for the continuous improvement of performance not only at the level of the individual student but also at the level of the school. Processes that build stakeholder buy-in and commitment to the accountability system are also key if the system is to be successful.

As such, the research-based framework designed by the research team includes elements that go well beyond the state's Consolidated Application reporting requirements (McKenna, 1997 & 1998; Fausset, 1998). In particular, the conceptual framework has six interrelated and reinforcing elements:

- **Alignment of state and local content standards.**
  The foundation for any accountability system is a set of clearly defined content standards that spell out what students should know and be able to do. In California, some districts were developing such standards prior to the state's own adoption of content standards. Therefore, crucial to having a system that relates consistent messages to schools and students about what is expected of them is ensuring some degree of alignment and congruence among standards at both local and state levels.

- **Student performance standards and aligned assessments.**
  Once content standards are established, levels of proficiency, that is, performance

standards, and assessments to measure whether or not students have met performance standards need to be put in place. In California, districts have generally been encouraged to develop their own performance standards and aligned multiple measures of assessment. While a statewide assessment system also exists, its alignment with state content standards is incomplete. Moreover, the state has yet to adopt performance standards.

- **Ongoing data analyses and reviews of school performance.**
  Performance standards for schools should also be set—for example, the designation of a percentage of students within a school who in a specified time should meet certain performance standards (e.g., 80% of all students meeting performance standards within five years). School performance standards or "performance goals" then serve as the basis for establishing state and district monitoring, assistance, and intervention programs. Schools should be encouraged to analyze student assessment data to ascertain factors that affect school performance. At the time of this study, California had a process for monitoring schools, but it was not tied to performance goals or to a program of intervention. (This subsequently changed with the passage of PSAA.)

- **School improvement and intervention strategy.**
  Schools that are identified as not meeting performance goals should have some avenue of assistance to help them improve. The first stage of such support should be voluntary, but with continued poor performance mandatory interventions to improve the school may apply. Interventions should be tailored to the unique needs of such schools.

- **Stakeholder involvement and engagement.**
  Since intervention programs may have significant sanctions associated with them, it is important that there be broad-based support for such an approach. In fact, involving affected stakeholders in all stages of developing an accountability system from standards development to carrying out of sanctions requires constructive communication with and buy-in from students, parents, teachers, school administrators, district policy makers, business, and other community members.

- **Continuous improvement of an accountability system.**
  A final critical element of an effective accountability system is a periodic, systematic checking on the impact of such a system. Is it meeting its objective, namely, raising student and school performance? Have there been unintended consequences? What changes to the system need to happen to ensure its ongoing effectiveness? Building a checks and balance process into the system—such as through an outside external evaluator—also helps to guarantee the long-term legitimacy of such a system.

Indicators for each of the six elements of the conceptual framework are shown in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1

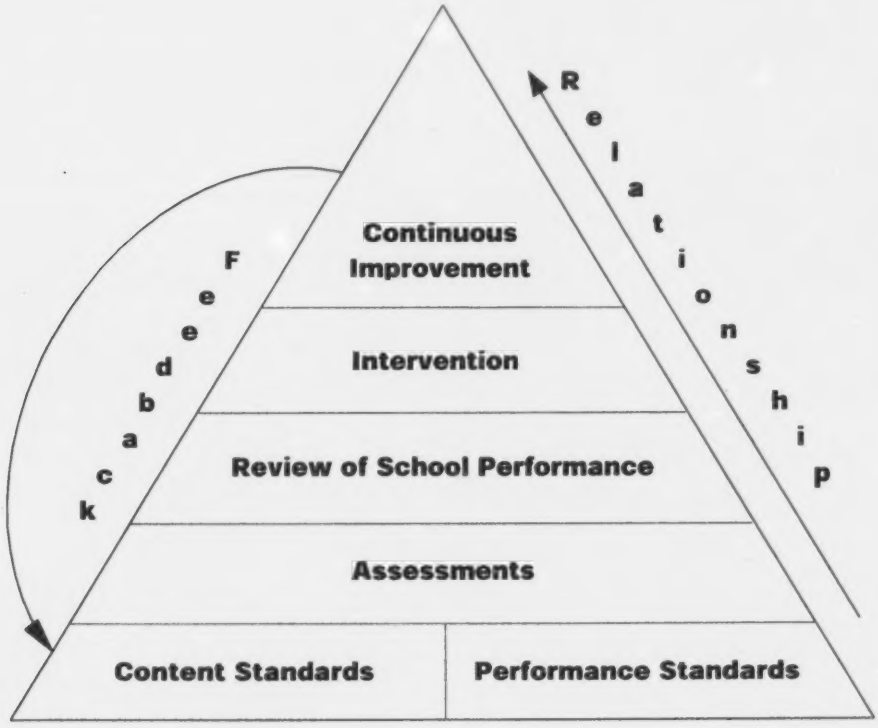
Conceptual Framework for Standards-Based Accountability Systems: Criteria and Indicators

Criterion 1: Content Standards and Alignment	Criterion 2: Student Performance Standards and Assessment	Criterion 3: Review of School Performance	Criterion 4: School Improvement and Intervention Strategy	Criterion 5: Stakeholder Involvement/ Engagement	Criterion 6: Continuous Improvement of the Accountability System
Indicators:	**Indicators:**	**Indicators:**	**Indicators:**	**Indicators:**	**Indicators:**
The district • has grade-level–specific content standards in mathematics and English/language arts. • has compared its content standards with the state standards. • has content standards that are at least as rigorous as the state standards. • has adopted curriculum and instructional materials that are aligned with the state and/or district standards. • proactively builds the capacity of all its schools to help all students meet the standards.	The district • has grade-level–specific performance standards for students in mathematics and English/language arts. • uses multiple measures of assessment as required by the state for gauging whether students meet grade level standards. • combines multiple measures in accordance with state requirements. • has established reliability and validity of any local assessment measures used. • has aligned locally developed assessments (if any) with state and/or district content standards. • provides incentives for students to do well on each assessment measure.	The district • has clear and high performance standards *for schools*. • has standards for progress over time *for schools* as well as absolute standards. • uses clearly defined criteria to identify schools in need of improvement. • builds the capacity of all schools to analyze/use data. • analyzes data to diagnose the causes of a school's low performance. • disaggregates assessment data to allow for fair comparisons among schools and to identify areas of concern related to equity. • compares the current year's data to the previous year's data. • has a system of incentives and consequences for schools related to student performance.	The district • has a clearly articulated and feasible intervention strategy for improving instruction. • has an intervention strategy that focuses on capacity building. • tailors particular interventions to meet the needs and address the problems of individual schools.	The district • involves multiple stakeholders in the formulation of the local accountability system. • communicates with stakeholder groups to make them aware of the existence of the local accountability system and to explain its implications. • attempts to foster buy-in among stakeholder groups to the point where they feel shared responsibility to help students meet standards. • makes assessment data public so as to make the public a partner in the accountability system.	The district • works to sustain, improve, and refine its accountability system over time. • is committed to long-term use of the assessment measures it has selected. • evaluates the effects of the accountability system. • uses the accountability system as a tool for increasing student achievement over the long run.

As Figure 3.2 illustrates, the components of the conceptual framework can be related in a pyramid fashion with the base of the pyramid representing the basis of an educational accountability system and the top of the pyramid representing the ultimate goal of continuous improvement of the accountability system. **Content standards** for curriculum and instruction, together with aligned professional development for teachers, and **performance standards** for students, at the base of the pyramid, form the foundation of an accountability system. Adopting content standards, even when they are aligned with state standards, is not enough. Districts and schools must test whether content standards are being taught by using **assessments that are aligned** with the content standards. Further, schools themselves must be held accountable via periodic **reviews of school performance**. Finding out how well schools are educating children is an effective part of an accountability system when **intervention strategies** are in place to reward good performance and assist schools with poor performance. Finally at the top of the pyramid is the goal of **continuous improvement** of the entire accountability system itself to ensure that the components are helping to improve education for all children.

Figure 3.2

Components of the Conceptual Framework for Accountability Systems



Many aspects of the framework's six elements were explored during our evaluation. As we gathered and analyzed information through the course of this study, it became apparent that some of these elements of an accountability system, such as an incentives and intervention program, were for various reasons not in place at either the state or local level. However, such elements were added at the state level with the passage of the PSAA.

Since the PSAA was not implemented at the time data were collected, there was no way to verify progress in those areas. Nevertheless, the conceptual framework still serves as a helpful guide/tool in reviewing the overall implementation status and impact of the newly emerging state accountability program. Had the contract been fully funded for three years as intended, the research team would have more fully developed and refined this framework to serve as a tool for both the state and districts to use in gauging progress in implementing their standards-based accountability system. The framework as it stands, while somewhat incomplete in its development, can still serve such a function to some degree.

In the Next Chapter

In addition to its potential use as a tool in reviewing accountability progress, the framework also played an important role in this study itself. Flowing from the study questions, the framework served as the basis for the design of the data collection instruments used in the evaluation. These instruments (which are included in the Appendix) are the subject of the following chapter, "Methodology."

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Chapter 4

Methodology

The school district constituted the primary unit of analysis for this evaluation, as suggested by the operative research questions (see Chapter 1). Researchers also focused some attention on the state and school levels, primarily through interviews. A mix of quantitative and qualitative methods were employed. To gather quantitative data, researchers administered an extensive survey about accountability systems to 200 California school districts and analyzed CDE reviews of the accountability plans of these same districts submitted as part of their Consolidated Applications. On the qualitative side, evaluators conducted interviews at state, district, and school levels and reviewed documents such as district accountability plans and content standards for selected districts. Each data source is described in depth below.

The study was designed around a common core of topic areas derived from the project's major evaluation questions and the research-based conceptual framework. Thus, the survey, interview protocols, and accountability plan review instruments were built around the same topics, so that the data they yielded could be triangulated to confirm and enrich the findings. Each of the data sources yielded different information and, of course, were not completely redundant. All, however, addressed the important ideas embodied in the conceptual framework, the research questions, or both.

District Survey

The district survey was the primary source of data for this evaluation. Two hundred California school districts were surveyed about their accountability components and practices. The research staff sent out the questionnaires used in this survey in March of 1999.

Selection of Districts. As Figure 4.1 shows, the sample of 200 districts was stratified by size and included

- the state's 120 largest districts (containing 63.3 percent of students in the state)
- 50 "medium-size" districts, selected randomly from among districts of that size (containing 33.9 percent of students in the state)
- 30 "small" districts, also selected randomly from the pool of similarly-sized districts (containing 2.8 percent of students in the state)

Figure 4.1

Sample for District Survey

Size of District	District Enrollment Range	Total Student Enrollment Within Range	Total Number of Districts	Number of Districts Selected	How Selected
Large	11,648–680,430	3,586,975 (63.3%)	120	120	all
Medium	1,078–11,636	1,919,200 (33.9%)	434	50	random sample
Small	5–1075	157,864 (2.8%)	434	30	random sample
Total	**5–680,430**	**5,664,039 (100%)**	**988**	**200**	

The group of 200 districts is about 20 percent of the number of school districts in the state. The sample was a probabilistic sample with different probabilities in each of the three strata: the 120 large districts were selected with certainty, the medium-sized districts were selected with a probability of 50/434, and the small district sample was selected with a probability of 30/434. The selection procedure yielded a sample consisting of 115 unified districts, 62 elementary school districts, and 23 high school districts.

Questionnaire Development. The accountability questionnaire was developed in order to answer the research questions posed at the beginning of the study and to investigate local standards-based accountability systems using the parameters of the conceptual framework (see Chapter 3). The questionnaire was composed of mainly discrete-answer questions with a few open-ended response items. It underwent numerous rounds of revision based on feedback from project staff, Advisory Group members, and CDE staff.

Questionnaire Composition. The items on the questionnaire were divided into the following topic areas: local accountability system features, content standards, student assessment measures, analysis and use of data, review of school performance, and helps and hindrances. The complete questionnaire is included in the Appendix.

Who Completed the Questionnaire. For logistical reasons, the questionnaires were sent to the individual in each selected district whose name appeared on the first page of the 1998–99 Consolidated Application for Funding Categorical Aid Programs, rather than the individual who completed the District Assessment and Accountability System Description part of the form (Part II, page 33). In order to maximize the likelihood that the appropriate district staff received the questionnaire, researchers included in the cover letter a request for recipients to forward the questionnaire to the person or people most familiar with accountability in the district or to share the completion of the questionnaire with others. Although there is some evidence that not all recipients did so, most questionnaires appear to have been properly

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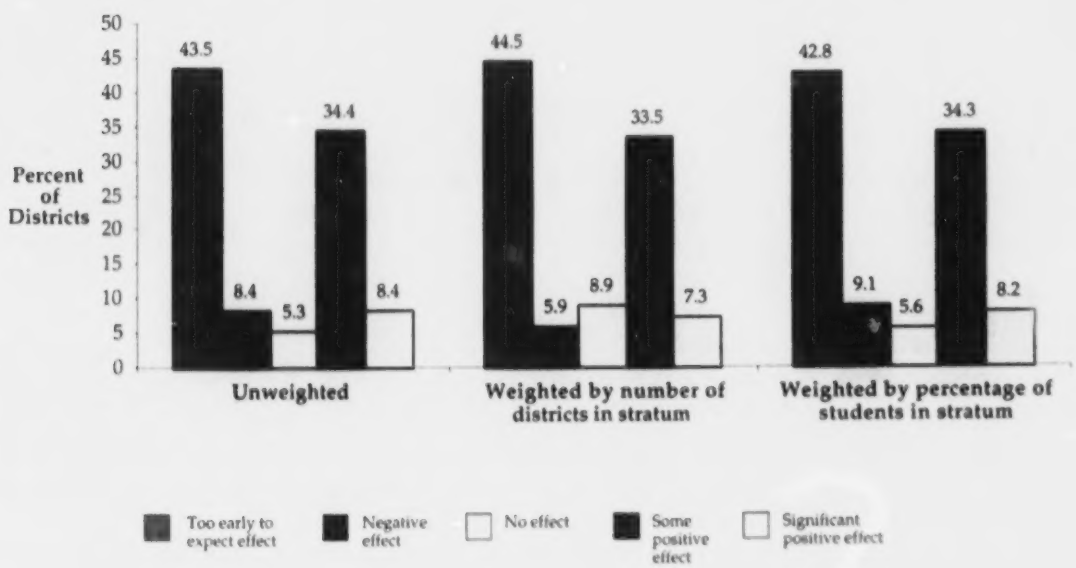
filled out by an appropriate district-level official (that is, by staff having responsibility for district accountability).

Response Rate. Questionnaires were received back from 136 districts. However, 3 of these questionnaires arrived too late to be included in the analysis, translating to a practical response rate of 66.5 percent (133 out of 200). The response rate did vary somewhat by size of district: for the large districts, 85 out of 120 districts returned the questionnaire (71%); 36 out of the 50 medium-sized districts returned the questionnaire (72%); but, in the small district stratum, 12 out of 30 questionnaires were returned, for a response rate of 40 percent.

The high response rate does allow generalizability of the results to districts throughout the state. In addition to the primary analysis using unweighted survey data, analysis was repeated using two different sets of weights. In the first instance, the data were weighted to represent districts in each stratum by dividing the total number of districts by the number of respondents (e.g., 120/85 for large). In the second instance, the data were weighted to represent students by dividing the percent of California students in the stratum by the number of respondents (e.g., 63.3/85 for large). As exemplified by Figure 4.2, all three analyses yielded similar results for most items on the questionnaire. In general, variations were quite minor.

Figure 4.2

Illustrative Comparison of Three Weighting Schemes
District Opinion About the Effects of Accountability on Standardized Test Scores



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State Interviews

In order to gain an understanding of the state's perspective on school district accountability, interviews were conducted with eight top-level policymakers, including legislators, legislative staff, and officials from the Governor's Office and the State Board of Education. In addition, information was obtained from five high-level "policy implementers" at the California Department of Education (CDE). Interviews took place early in 1999.

Selection of Interviewees. Suggestions about who to interview at the state level were solicited from contacts at the California Department of Education. Members of the research team used their own knowledge and expertise to identify additional potential interviewees.

Subject of the Interviews. Different interview protocols were used for the policymakers and the policy implementers. For the policymakers, questions focused on the overall purposes and drivers for accountability systems, the role of the state, appropriate state interventions, likely impediments, and relationship with other state policies. For the implementers, questions were about interaction between CDE and local districts, the influence of federal and state categorical programs, roles and responsibilities, early impact, best practices, and helps and hindrances. Both protocols are included in the Appendix.

District Interviews

Members of the research team visited seven school districts during the spring of 1999. In each district, one to three district-level personnel were interviewed about their local accountability system. Additional dialogue with personnel from small, rural districts occurred at the annual conference of small districts in March 1999.

Selection of Districts. The seven districts visited were selected based on a variety of criteria including:

- size (five districts were large urban districts; the sixth had an enrollment of between 10,000 and 15,000 students; and the seventh had fewer than 2000 students);
- geographical diversity;
- questionnaire completion (only districts that had returned questionnaires were visited); and
- CDE evaluation of the district accountability plan (see below); one district with strong adherence to CDE guidelines and one district with weak adherence to CDE guidelines were visited.

Selection of Interviewees. For the identification of district interviewees, project staff started with the name provided on the final page of each district's completed accountability questionnaire. In some districts, this was the only person interviewed. In other districts, an additional one or two people were interviewed, either as recommended by the person who completed the questionnaire or based on the personal knowledge of research team members about appropriate people to interview in given districts. The interviewees were district officials such as directors of research and evaluation and assistant superintendents.

Subject of the Interviews. Research team members asked district officials questions about accountability in general, standards, timelines, the roles of various actors in the accountability system, the use of data, challenges faced, successful practices, sources of assistance, and the new state accountability system (then being initiated). The district interview protocol is included in the Appendix.

School-Level Interviews

Research team members were able to leverage their visits to schools for another CDE-sponsored study, the Mathematics Implementation Study, to benefit the accountability evaluation. As part of the math study (scheduled to run through March 2000), trained mathematics observers interviewed and visited the classrooms of more than 50 teachers in eight California school districts throughout the state during the spring of 1999. In each district, researchers visited approximately six to eight teachers; half were fourth-grade teachers and half were eighth-grade teachers. The principals at most of the schools also were interviewed.

Selection of Districts. School visits occurred in eight districts participating in the Mathematics Implementation Study. These districts were not the same as those visited for the Accountability Study, although there was some overlap. Factors of size, geographical diversity, and minimization of travel costs figured heavily into the selection of the districts. Notably, all of the districts were relatively large and urban, due to sampling requirements for the design of the Mathematics Implementation Study.

Selection of Schools/Teachers. For the Mathematics Implementation Study, a questionnaire was administered to 800 mathematics teachers in 11 districts.[1] Visits were made only to schools from which at least two teachers had returned their questionnaires. In districts where multiple schools fit this description, schools were selected at random, provided that the mathematics classes of the teachers who had returned the questionnaire met certain basic

[1] This was a different questionnaire than the one received by districts about their accountability systems. The results of the survey of mathematics teachers are not yet available but for the most part have little direct bearing on accountability.

criteria (e.g., composed of at least 50 percent 4th grade or 8th grade students). The schools that were selected were then contacted with the request for a visit; schools that declined were replaced with other candidates. In most schools that were visited, research staff interviewed two mathematics teachers (both of whom had returned their mathematics questionnaire) and the school principal.

Subject of the Interviews. Although the interviews and classroom observations centered on matters primarily related to mathematics instruction, resources, and professional development, they also touched on accountability, standards, and assessment. Different protocols were used for principals and for teachers. Each protocol included one question explicitly about accountability, and accountability sometimes came up in other contexts as well during interviews. Both protocols are included in the appendix. Relevant findings from the school-level interviews are included throughout this report.

Analysis of Selected Districts' Content Standards

The English/language arts and mathematics standards of five districts were reviewed in comparison to the standards adopted by the California State Board of Education in 1997. This analysis was undertaken in the summer of 1999.

Selection of Districts. Districts whose standards were reviewed included districts visited either for this study or for the Mathematics Implementation Study. Although it would have been preferable to look at more than five sets of standards, several districts reported that their latest standards were "being printed" or were "not yet available" at the time the request was made (summer 1999).

Nature of the Review. Each district's English/language arts and mathematics standards were compared to the State Board Adopted Standards. Grades 3, 4, 7, and 8 were the focuses of the analysis, which consisted of two major components. First, the organization of the standards was considered. Second, the standards were compared according to the state's definition of rigor — breadth, depth, pace of learning, and levels of performance. The results of this review are presented in Chapter 6, "Content Standards."

CDE Review of 190 District Accountability Plans

Independent of this accountability evaluation, during January of 1999, CDE recruited a cadre of people to review the accountability plans of all districts in the state that submitted them. Nearly 900 districts of the approximately 1000 in the state submitted accountability plans to CDE. CDE created a rubric to be used in the review of the plans.

Selection of Districts. The research team obtained the completed reviews for 190 of the 200 districts in the study's survey sample. Reviews of the other 10 districts were not available because CDE had not received accountability plans from these districts. 126 of the 190 districts had returned the evaluation study's questionnaire.

CDE Review Forms. Two forms were used by CDE in their review. The first form, the Local Accountability Plan Comment Summary, was developed by CDE to depict how closely a plan adhered to CDE guidelines. The comment summary was divided into "Recommended Modifications" and "Commendable Elements" for each of the following areas: overview, local standards, assessment, grade-level expectations, and reporting. A second form was developed by CDE to obtain a general, overall rating of how well the plan adhered to CDE guidelines and to list the types of components a plan might include. Each plan was given an overall rating (from 1 "Inadequate" to 4 "Exemplary"), and measures used and methods for combining measures were noted. The forms are included in the Appendix.

Independent Review of 36 District Accountability Plans

The research team independently reviewed the "District Assessment and Accountability System Description" from the Consolidated Applications (1998–99) for 36 districts in early 1999. The purposes for this review were for researchers to familiarize themselves with the accountability systems (as reported on the Consolidated Applications) of a broad range of districts, to inform the development of the district interview protocol, and to validate the conceptual framework.

Selection of Districts. Based on factors such as size and geography, the research team identified 22 districts whose accountability plans would be reviewed; CDE staff identified an additional 23 districts. Some of the selected districts, however, did not submit the Accountability System Description to CDE, so a total of only 36 plans were reviewed. Exactly half of these districts (18) were included in the 200 districts that were surveyed.

Nature of the Review. The plans were reviewed using a rubric that combined the conceptual framework and features of the CDE review instrument. The major categories examined were content standards, assessments, and use of data.

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Chapter 5

The Status of Local Accountability Systems

Highlights of Findings

- **Most districts are still in the early stages of developing their local standards-based accountability systems.**
  School districts are in various stages of developing their systems. Most, however, have only recently begun to put elements of an accountability system in place. The most common elements implemented to date are content standards and assessments. Rewards and interventions have rarely been implemented. Even districts with good accountability designs often have only just begun in "cascading" their system to the school and classroom level.

- **Development of accountability mechanisms is a long, sometimes messy process.**
  Districts typically seek wide participation in developing an accountability system. Such a development process is seen as iterative and ongoing. Some more-sophisticated districts have had such systems longer. Smaller and medium-sized districts have a more difficult time in implementation.

- **People hold varying views on what constitutes accountability, but many equate it with assessment.**
  Conceptions of accountability are often not uniform—even within the same district or school. Interviews revealed that accountability means different things to different people. Yet many district and school staff view the SAT-9 as the embodiment of district accountability, frequently underemphasizing the other components of accountability.

- **There is strong support for the concept of accountability—less so for the details of its implementation.**
  Most people, particularly at the district level, believe in the potential of accountability systems to raise student achievement. However, many administrators are concerned about the specifics of accountability system implementation.

Less than three years ago, the California Department of Education first directed California school districts to begin work on local standards-based accountability systems. Since that directive, some districts have made remarkable progress in designing systems, while others are still struggling over the first hurdles. There is widespread variation in how districts across the state have approached accountability, and an equal degree of variability in how far they have progressed in design and implementation.

For the purposes of this study, the overarching research question on the topic of accountability in general was:

> ***At what stage or level are districts in planning and implementing their standards-based accountability systems?***

Status of Accountability System Development

- **Districts were still developing their local standards-based accountability systems in the spring of 1999. Some components, such as content standards and assessment systems, were in place, but others, such as interventions and rewards, were missing.**

A standards-based accountability system is a complex entity with multiple components, each of which takes time to plan and implement. Unsurprisingly, a majority of districts reported on the survey that they are still working on the development of their systems. Whereas 40.3 percent of district survey respondents reported that their districts do have standards-based accountability systems, over half (56.6 percent) reported that their systems are still "in development."

The survey also asked respondents to indicate the level of implementation in their district of various components of accountability systems including content standards in English/language arts and mathematics, multiple assessment measures, alignment of assessments with content standards, reviews of school performance, intervention strategies, and rewards or incentives. For each item, respondents could choose from "not implemented," "partially implemented," "fully implemented for less than 2 years," "fully implemented for more than 2 years," and "don't know."

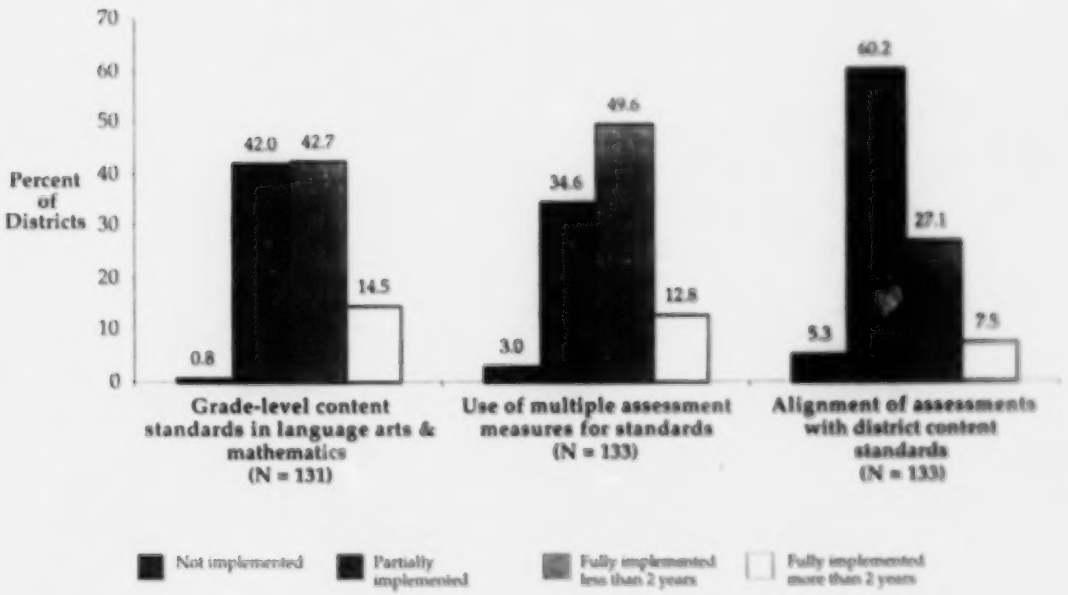
According to survey responses, as shown in Figure 5.1, two components that were most likely to have been "fully implemented" were grade-level content standards in English/language arts and mathematics (57.2 percent of districts) and the use of multiple assessment measures to determine whether students meet grade-level standards (62.4

percent of districts). As these were the two components most heavily emphasized by CDE for reporting on the Consolidated Application, it is probably not surprising that districts elected to begin with them.

Indeed, "begin with" is the appropriate phrasing: about three-quarters of the districts that reported that content standards and multiple measures were fully implemented said that the components had been fully implemented "for less than two years."[1] Figure 5.1 shows that less than 15 percent of the responding districts had these two components in place for more than two years. Somewhat lagging behind these two components in implementation level was "alignment of assessments with district content standards," which 60.2 percent of districts reported was "partially implemented."

Figure 5.1

District Reporting of Implementation of Content Standards and Assessments



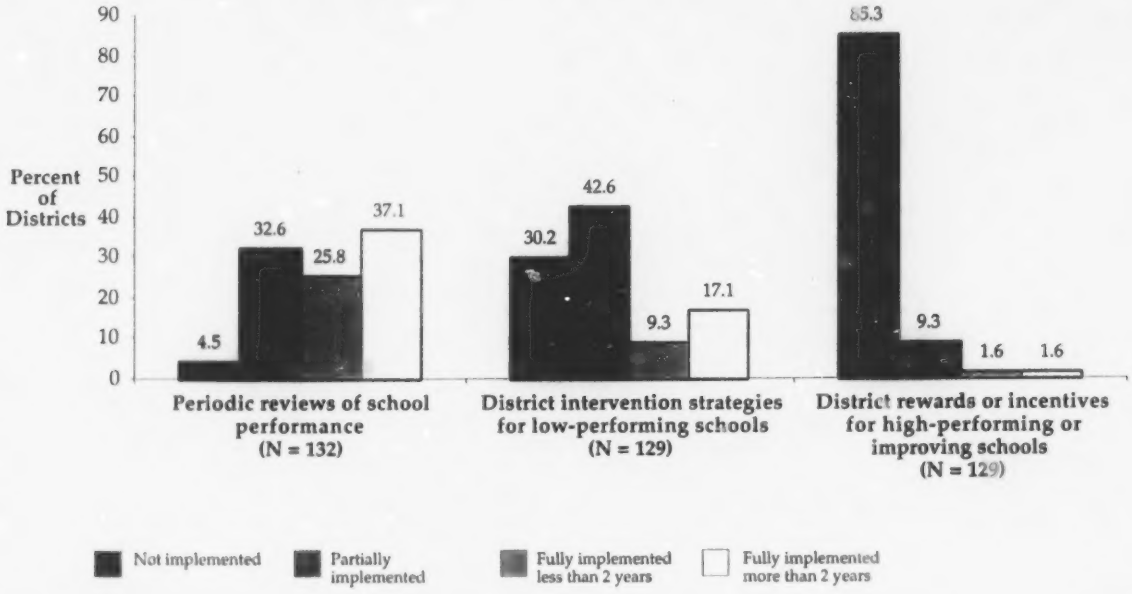
Other components of a local accountability system were less prevalent, as Figure 5.2 shows. For example, although a large number of districts reported having fully implemented periodic reviews of school performance (25.8 percent of districts for less than two years, and 37.1 percent for more than two years, for a total of 62.9 percent), districts do not appear to

[1] Content standards and assessment measures are further discussed in the following chapters.

have made use of these reviews for accountability purposes. For instance, about 30.2 percent of districts said that they had *not* implemented district intervention strategies for low-performing schools. Even more strikingly, 85.3 percent of districts said that they had not implemented district rewards or incentives for high-performing or improving schools.

Figure 5.2

District Reporting of Implementation of School Performance Accountability Components



NOTE: Additionally, "Don't know" was marked by 1 respondent for intervention strategies and by 3 respondents for rewards.

Thus, most districts do not appear to have in place a comprehensive system of interventions and rewards/incentives, often considered a key component of accountability. However, state-level directives in the standards-based accountability system did not focus on such a component, so districts' lack of attention to this area is unsurprising.[2] (See Chapter 9 for further discussion of consequences and incentives.)

[2] Even nationally, very few districts have their own interventions/rewards programs; where such programs exist, they are usually implemented at the state level, as California will now be doing under the Public Schools Accountability Act.

These data taken as a whole, suggest that school districts in California were moving ahead in developing accountability systems.[3] Over half of the districts had adopted content standards and implemented the use of multiple measures for grade-level standards. Most were still working on aligning assessments with content standards. This trend indicates that the instructional framework was in place for many districts. But the supporting structure to make the system work was not yet implemented: less than half of districts had interventions for low-performing schools or for students themselves. Only a small minority had district rewards for improving schools.

In sum, taking together the six data displays in Figures 5.1 and 5.2, researchers can almost pinpoint where California school districts were in terms of building accountability systems. They were aligning assessments with local content standards, having already adopted standards and developed a combination of assessments to measure student progress. In a number of senses, then, districts had "assessment systems." But districts were only beginning to recognize as essential the school performance aspects of accountability systems. Although significant progress had been made, the survey results show that districts did not yet have standards-based "accountability systems" in the spring of 1999.

Interviews confirmed this impression. Administrators in several districts — even those considered "ahead of the curve" in terms of accountability — indicated in interviews that they did not think their districts have accountability *systems per se*, but only *pieces* of such systems. For most, the missing piece appears to be the consequences/rewards component — the "teeth" of accountability.

One Director of Research and Evaluation, for example, believes that his district has an assessment system, but not what he would consider to be an accountability system. The district has spent the past couple of years focusing on the development of assessments to measure achievement vis-à-vis district standards. Schools are given long-term goals and are provided with performance statistics and annual targets for improvement. However, there are no consequences for failing to meet targets and no "official" accountability system. The district did begin to talk about how to use the assessment system as part of a broader accountability system, but that conversation has mostly been tabled as new assessments are implemented and as new guidelines have been issued by the state.

In another district, a medium-sized district whose Accountability Plan in their Consolidated Application adhered closely to CDE guidelines, administrators who were interviewed said similarly that their district does not have an accountability system. They are developing pieces — an assessment system, a program to end social promotion — but they do not feel they have the staffing resources to implement "a true accountability system."

[3] The survey data are, of course, based on self-report, and they have not been systematically verified. Districts may have overestimated their accountability implementation.

Cross-District Snapshot: School-Level Descriptions of Accountability Systems

Interviews with school-level personnel — principals and teachers — did not focus on accountability *per se*. However, the principal interview protocol and the teacher interview protocol each contained one general question about accountability:

> For principals: *These days there is a lot of emphasis placed on accountability. Have you felt that your school has been held accountable? If so, what have you been held accountable for and to whom? What impact, if any, has the state or district accountability system had on your school?*
>
> For teachers: *These days there is a lot of talk about accountability. How would you describe your district's accountability system? Are there ways in which it influences your teaching?*

Accountability sometimes came up in other contexts as well during interviews. Although most responses focused on peoples' overall perceptions of and reactions to accountability policy, many straightforwardly described their district accountability systems — the measures used, the goals set, etc. — and the implications of these systems for their schools or themselves. Each of the following remarks (the first four from principals, the last two from teachers) originated in a different district:

> *The district holds us accountable because the state holds the district accountable. They check on us by surveying our scores on standardized tests. The central office staff comes and interviews us; the school district does the same. Teachers are asked to evaluate themselves. These are the various ways that we are held accountable.*
>
> *The principal is accountable, and he should be. If our performance is not satisfactory I am the one who is held responsible. There are a number of accountability measures that are used by the district: portfolio products, parent surveys, tone on campus, and most notably the SAT-9. For those away from the classroom, the SAT-9 seems to carry the most weight. There is no articulated performance level, but the expectation is that scores will go up. I have a work plan for our school according to district needs and goals. In it I must project what I'm going to do to address those issues.*
>
> *Our superintendent believes strongly in accountability. Our SAT-9 scores have been analyzed and, together with the standards, will drive the curriculum.*
>
> *We are definitely held accountable by both the district and the state. The district expects our scores to go up. Next year we will use state standards and mesh them with the Standards 2000. The district does periodic school assessments, in SAT-9 format, based on the California standards. We score them here on campus and adjust our program according to the results.*
>
> *I am held accountable through SAT-9 and district performance tasks that are given out once a year. Students have three practice performance tasks before the final.*
>
> *[District accountability is based on] a triangulated assessment. Like, they have the performance assessment, and then they have, how they do in your class, and then there's the SAT-9. Those are the three accountability pieces, I think, that we're kind of held to. How they perform in the class, the SAT-9, and the performance assessment. And I think that's the way it's going; they want to have the three-piece type thing going on.*

The Development and Implementation Process

- **The development of an accountability system can be a messy, lengthy process.**

District interviews suggested that the process of developing an accountability system is far from quick and straightforward. In part, this may be because some districts are trying to use a community-based approach to development rather than a top-down approach. Districts report that various groups provide input, and much work is done by committees that have teachers, principals, and staff representatives. On the survey, 95.5 percent of districts indicated that teachers were involved in the development of the district accountability system, and 94 percent indicated that principals and other school administrators participated. 63.2 percent said that school board members had also been involved, and perhaps most strikingly of all, 58.6 percent said that parents had been involved. Nearly 25 percent indicated the involvement of business/community members. The extent of participation of any of these groups, however, is unknown, and it likely is highly variable from district to district.

The length of time that districts have been developing their accountability systems also seems quite variable, as does the amount of resources they have to work with. Interviews suggested that the more sophisticated districts tended to be "early adopters"; small rural districts tend to have the most difficult time developing full-blown accountability systems and have for the most part been late adopters. However, survey results indicate that it may be the medium-sized districts that have experienced the most difficulty in developing their accountability systems. Fifty percent of small-district respondents and 45 percent of large-district respondents reported that their district does have what they consider to be a standards-based accountability system, but only 27 percent of medium-sized districts gave this response.

- **Design of an accountability system is no guarantee of implementation, especially for districts with limited resources.**

Interviews indicated that what an accountability system looks like on paper and what it looks like in practice may be radically different. Where there are wide disparities, it is usually because districts have been under immense time and personnel resource pressure. Again, this was particularly true of small, rural districts, which have extremely limited access to skilled personnel to implement complex accountability measures. It was also an issue for some medium-sized districts. The challenges districts face in implementing accountability systems will be discussed further in Chapter 11, "Challenges and Assistance."

Changes within districts also sometimes interfere with implementation. This was particularly true in one district that was visited. This district, using a broad-based approach, designed a highly impressive accountability system, including consequences for schools. Just when the system's design had been finalized, top district leadership underwent a change; the new administration that came in had different priorities — and a different approach to accountability — than the previous one. Although the accountability system that was designed still exists on paper and may be implemented to some extent, its future is in question and it probably will not carry the force that was intended.

- **Title I schools are slightly ahead in implementing accountability measures.**

About half of districts reported on the survey that the degree of accountability implementation was the same for Title I schools as for non-Title I schools. Approximately 18 percent of districts reported that Title I schools were "more advanced" or "ahead" of other schools in terms of accountability implementation. Very few districts reported the reverse. This is likely explainable by the longer existence of the requirements for Title I schools, as suggested by the following survey responses:

> *Title I schools are more sophisticated in their ability to analyze data for program evaluation due to a history of assessment being required. Subgroups within the Title I schools are better prepared to use data to drive program improvement than are non-Title I schools and subgroups unaccustomed to working with special programs.*

> *In general, the Title I schools in our district have had experience in the implementation of student performance assessment for a longer period of time than most of the non-Title I schools. For this reason, although there is the same level of districtwide assessment at all schools, the Title I schools are probably more comfortable with the accountability process and have had a smoother transition into the state's accountability system.*

Conceptions of Accountability

- **"Accountability" means different things to different people — even people in the same district or school.**

The remarks of district staff, principals, and teachers about accountability reveal a wide variation in perceptions of and reactions to accountability. Within districts, and even within schools, there was often considerable inconsistency in interviewees' comments about accountability in their districts. At the district level, there were at least two districts in which administrators were clearly operating with different conceptions of "accountability." In one

of these districts, the Director of Research and Evaluation said that the district had an assessment system but not an accountability system; a program specialist, on the other hand, seemed to feel that the district *does* have a functional accountability system.

In another district, the Superintendent's perception was that the district has a definite accountability plan and is ahead of most districts. The Director of Special Projects, however, implied that, although there is a lot going on in the district and many innovative improvements are taking place, the district does not really have an accountability system in place because there are no clear expectations for the actors and no consequences.

Interviewers found similar inconsistencies at the school level. For example, a principal in one school stated, "The factors that have the most influence over teacher practice are test scores and district accountability." A teacher in this school, however, replied, "There is none," when asked about accountability.

Even in districts that have well-articulated and well-thought-out accountability plans, awareness and understanding of these plans is highly variable. For example, in one district where interviews with district officials revealed an impressive accountability system, the principals and some teachers were clearly aware of this system, discussing it with depth and comprehension:

> *[From a principal] Accountability is in the principal's hands. The learning director and the vice-principal need to help. We'll divide up the faculty. We'll be in and out of their classrooms. We need to look at test scores and disaggregated data to determine the areas of need. Then teachers need to make a plan. The district is really into accountability. They have an accountability model. Every school has its own site plan and the accountability model is in it. The plan includes test scores and goals with plans for next year for raising scores and meeting goals. They'll have a lot of explaining to do if scores aren't raised.*

> *[From a principal] Accountability begins with each teacher…Schoolwide we're accountable to the district with our school accountability program. The schools must submit accountability goals. We submitted five goals. Our goals included moving students from the 1st quartile to the 2nd quartile. I identified the target children and met with the teachers, the parents, and the students. We're waiting to see the effect it has had on the test scores.*

> *[From a teacher] We have to have a site plan. In it, target students have been identified (students working below normed level, 40 something percent). The goal this year is to get them to within the national average. If we fail to meet our goal it will be higher next year….Our goal within the next 5-7 years is to have 90% on grade level based on the state test. We have no district assessment.*

Other teachers in this district, however, seemed less aware of the system. "We don't really have accountability," commented one teacher. Another stated, "The principal puts it into

our hands to be accountable — to make sure [students are] learning. I don't know that the district holds us accountable. It's up to the teacher to hold the students accountable." A third teacher was aware that the district has an accountability plan but said that "there is no follow-through" — a possible explanation for the discrepancy between district views and teacher views.

Another possible explanation for discrepancies between various views of accountability is that "accountability" may have a different meaning for different people. This was clear in many teachers' responses to the general interview question about accountability. For example, many teachers interpreted "accountability" as being about holding *students* accountable — certainly one important aspect of accountability, but not generally the one considered primary in discussions of accountability *systems*. Each of the following comments comes from a teacher in a different district:

> *Social promotion is a lack of accountability. And having units count is a form of accountability.*
>
> *I hold my students accountable for everything. And, you know, we have to work together as a team…I put in my half, they put in their half, and they know what's expected of them.*
>
> *None [no accountability] — students with F's go on to high school anyway.*
>
> *My first semester I was going strict 90, 80, 70…but the ESL woman flat out told me I was flunking too many kids. So I've incorporated more kinds of assessment. Things like participation and grades for their hands-on lessons.*
>
> *It [accountability] is still unclear. Now summer school is voluntary and next year it will be mandatory. A lot is changing.*

Like this last teacher, many other teachers admitted that they were unsure of what, exactly, their district's accountability polices *were*, especially given the changing or fragmented nature of accountability policy. One teacher talked about how accountability "is changing"; she mentioned that "The state, the district, and the teacher's union are all asking for some form of accountability." Another teacher commented, "The district is not clear on who is attributed with what accountability."

In addition, many people who were interviewed gave conflicting accounts of what the consequences for failing to show improvement would be; this will be further discussed in Chapter 9, "Consequences and Incentives."

- **Many people, especially teachers, equate accountability with assessment, particularly with the SAT-9.**

Although, as discussed previously, accountability is a multifaceted concept involving such components as content standards; aligned curriculum, instruction, and professional development; and rewards and consequences, many people who were interviewed appear to interpret "accountability" as relating specifically to assessment, and particularly the SAT-9. This was especially true of teachers. Representative teacher responses to the general question about accountability included the following:

> *We are held accountable for our student scores on the SAT-9. The district expects scores to go up. It definitely influences my teaching. I make sure to cover everything on it before the test.*
>
> *The district has given inservices about preparing our students with basic skills and test-taking strategies (for SAT-9 and [another district assessment]).*
>
> *Don't know of one [an accountability system] other than test scores.*
>
> *The SAT-9 test is our accountability system. They want to see the scores come up. We also have a district test that we give at the end of each year.*
>
> *Well, throughout the year, we have some standardized tests...So, I think there's some accountability there, from the district's point of view.*
>
> *I feel it [accountability] mainly through the district, when they see their test scores, whether or not they are at a certain percentile.*
>
> *We've had many inservices here regarding testing: good job here or this is where we can improve. I went to an inservice last summer on improving and interpreting test scores.*
>
> *We are accountable to the Stanford-9....There is a lot of encouragement to do well on the Stanford-9. I spent two whole weeks giving Stanford-9 practice tests. I was told we had to do it.*
>
> *I know where we are, our scores are really low...*
>
> *We have the SAT-9. We seem to base everything on it.*

General Reactions to the Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999

I'm aware of the changes the Governor has proposed. I like the accountability for schools and teachers. Who has a job that isn't accountable? We have to be careful how we measure though.

—Teacher in spring 1999

Although the main focus of this evaluation study was the Standards-Based Accountability System, some data were collected on the more recent Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999. The district-level interview protocol contained the question, "What concerns, if any, do you have about the new accountability system being implemented by the state?" Similarly, an open-ended survey question asked district administrators, "What is your opinion of the pending state legislation related to school accountability?" Responses are summarized below and in subsequent chapters where appropriate.

- **Districts' overall reactions to the new accountability policy were varied. Most were quite positive; a few were very negative.**

When the questionnaire was distributed, and when many districts completed it, the PSAA legislation had not yet been passed. Although some respondents did not appear to know exactly which legislation the question referred to or commented on various other pieces of legislation (e.g., High School Exit Exam, Peer Review), most did have comments on SB1X (now PSAA).

In general, respondents had some positive things to say about the new system. Some, in fact, were quite optimistic about its potential effects:

It's huge!...In the long run, it will be valuable and help our kids.

As the director of Categorical Programs, the accountability [of] SB1X is great! Educators need to see the relationship between teaching and learning. I hope that the Title I Reauthorization will accept California's accountability model.

In the long run, it should create more sense of responsibility for the staff, since they are being asked to be accountable for what is happening in the classroom.

We have more than 34 years of history with a standards-based accountability system which is very compatible with the direction the state is heading.

Mandated accountability will drive the district to review current programs and practices and make adjustments for improved student performance.

It would be feasible to implement the state model. Our local system will complement the state model and will also be an alternative stand-alone system to validate/verify findings based on the state model.

We support the move toward accountability and staff has participated on various committees on accountability.

This legislation should force some intensified efforts to provide greater support to the language development needs of our predominantly LEP population.

A small number of survey respondents, however, were extremely negative about the new accountability legislation. One person merely drew a "thumbs down" illustration; another wrote "awful, ill conceived, partly harmful." Another respondent wrote only, "Very tired of being micromanaged," and a respondent from a small, rural district said, "The plan does not work for us."

- **Many district administrators support the philosophy behind the PSAA but have concerns about the details of implementation.**

Many people suggested that they supported the philosophy behind the new legislation, but were concerned about some of the specifics or about how exactly it would be implemented. Some district administrators who were interviewed expressed comments along these lines. One Director of Research and Evaluation, for example, said that he sees a lot of good aspects in the new legislation and thinks that the state does need an accountability system. However, he continued, the system must be fair and that ultimately it has to make a difference at the site level, in the classroom. The Director of State and Federal Programs in a different district commented that he has no problem being held accountable as long as the system makes sense and is fair.

Several survey respondents voiced similar "conditionally positive" sentiments. For example:

Accountability is good — the way you achieve it is the question in the new accountability law.

State legislation has admirable goals, but is written with varying degrees of vagueness that make it difficult to plan and implement in ways that are not disruptive to schools. I feel we need to have goals and policies established and let districts be responsible for their accomplishment and have more local control. Our district is moving ahead in a professional manner and has no problem with being held accountable.

In favor of accountability but needs to be aligned to curriculum standards.

Pending state legislation regarding the use of SAT-9 data along with other performance indicators to rank California schools can make a positive difference for low-performing schools and students if sufficient support and appropriate interventions are provided for these sites and students.

Accountability is a positive direction for public education. Legislature must develop the API in such a manner that it can inform instructional practices and not be reduced to a compliance item!

We support State's fast-track actions, but would like to see multi-choice tests replaced somewhat by more performance-based assessments. Vermont's systems are intriguing.

It should be phased [in] for the students who have been in the system. Ultimately, if done well, using criterion versus normed assessments, it should be positive for all students.

Once the augmented test is improved, the pending legislation will be positive. It will drive change. ... However, the augmented test in its current configuration will not give us meaningful information.

Numerous districts offered more specificity about their concerns with the new legislation. Sections in subsequent chapters discuss the concerns that were raised most frequently.

In the Next Chapter

As the comments above indicate, most districts were cautiously optimistic about the PSAA. One reason for this optimism, as shown in the next chapter, was that most districts had experience with rigorous content standards for their students, one of the six key elements of accountability systems.

Chapter 6

Content Standards

Highlights of Findings

- **Almost all districts have recently completed a lengthy, broad-based standards development process.**
  About 90 percent of district survey respondents reported that their districts have adopted mathematics and English/language arts content standards. For most of these districts, this adoption has taken place in the past three years. Developing standards is a lengthy, complicated, iterative, and ongoing process involving many district, school, and community stakeholders.

- **Districts claim that the state standards were used to develop or modify local standards, but the rigor of local standards remains uncertain.**
  Once the state standards were adopted by the State Board, most local districts report that they either adopted them in whole or used them for comparison purposes in developing or modifying existing local standards. Given that many districts had already developed local standards prior to the establishment of the state standards, this alignment process was sometimes a source of frustration. Most districts also report their local standards to be as rigorous as state standards. However, an analysis of some districts' local standards by project staff raised questions about such claims.

- **Local content standards have yet to make a consistent impact at the classroom level.**
  Although most districts report that the majority of teachers are using local standards in the classroom, school-level observations and interviews suggest otherwise. There is an increasing disparity in how content standards are understood and used as they filter down to the school and classroom level. The apparent lack of alignment between curriculum and standards, as well as the inadequate time spent on professional development related to standards, may contribute to this problem.

Content standards — what students should know and be able to do at each grade level — are the first building block of a standards-based accountability system. If schools are going to be held accountable for ensuring that students master certain content, then that content must be clearly specified. Content standards perform that function.

The movement to establish content standards is due at least in part to federal legislation passed in 1994. This bill, called the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), mandates that districts adopt academic standards at least in the areas of reading and mathematics if they wish to receive federal funding. California began requiring districts to develop local reading and mathematics content standards for reporting purposes in 1996–97 if they were undergoing a Coordinated Compliance Review (CCR) or submitting a Consolidated Application for categorical funding (most districts fall into at least one of these categories).

The following year, in 1997, the California State Board of Education adopted statewide standards in English/language arts and mathematics, followed by science standards in 1998. Districts were required to align their local standards with the new state standards in order to ensure that the local standards are "at least as rigorous as" the state standards.

For the purposes of this study, the overarching research questions on the topic of content standards were:

> ***What is the nature of local content and performance standards in language arts and mathematics and how do they compare with state standards? What mechanism does the district use to compare its standards with the state's model standards?***
>
> ***To what degree have district standards been implemented in schools? At what stage or level are districts and schools in planning and implementing the district standards?***

Development and Adoption of Local Content Standards

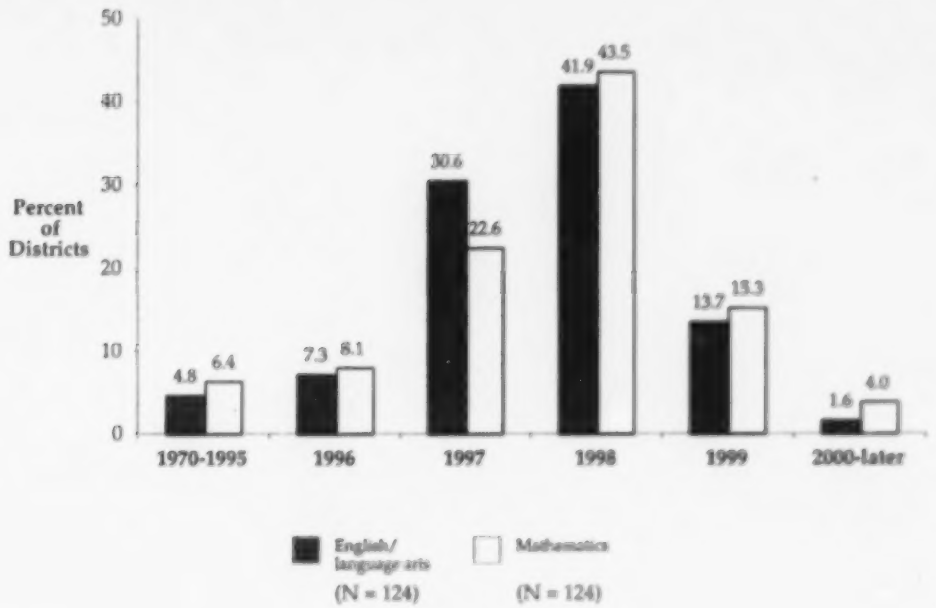
> *I believe standards are important. You have to know where you're going before you take off or you're going to just be everywhere. They've influenced me more since I've come to California. To me, "standard" is just a word that gets everybody to the same. If these are what are going to get all to the same page so we can be assessed in the same way, then good. It's important. They're not just a measure of what kids do, they're a measure of what we [teachers] do. I think standards have also helped us talk about what we do.*
>
> *— Teacher*

- **Most districts report that their current content standards have been adopted only recently and apply equally to all students in the district.**

According to the district survey, most districts have now adopted content standards in English/language arts (91 percent of districts) and mathematics (86.5 percent of districts). In general, these standards are relatively new; for both subject areas, between 55 and 60 percent of districts reported that the standards were adopted in 1998 or 1999. That is, districts in California have moved from not doing much vis-à-vis standards to a flurry of activity. (See Figure 6.1.)

Figure 6.1

Reported Years Districts Adopted Content Standards for English/Language Arts and Mathematics



These survey results suggest that districts' Consolidated Application accountability plans — even those submitted for 1998–99 — were not necessarily a good indicator of whether districts have adopted content standards. An independent review of 36 of the accountability plans found that it was unclear what, if any, standards had been adopted by 10 (27.8%) of these districts. The official CDE review of the plans, similarly, found that among 190 districts (190 of the 200 districts that were surveyed for this study), 52 (27.4%) needed to

clarify where they were in the process of adopting/implementing mathematics and/or language arts standards. However, it cannot be concluded that these districts had not in fact adopted standards — it can only be concluded that they did not mention standards in their accountability plans.

Most districts, it seems, hold all students in the district to the same standards. Less than one percent of survey respondents said that different district schools use different content standards, and CDE found that only about 5 percent of the 190 accountability plans did not appear to hold all groups of students to the same academic standards.

- **Development of local content standards in English/language arts and mathematics has been a broad-based, lengthy process, and for many districts is still continuing.**

Both survey results and interviews suggest that the development of local standards has been a fairly broad-based process, involving many stakeholders. Over 70 percent of districts surveyed indicated the involvement of the district accountability and/or assessment director(s), and over 80 percent mentioned the participation of district or school administrators. Not too surprisingly, almost all districts indicated that teachers were involved. Some 60 percent of districts reported that school board members were involved, and about 50 percent indicated that parents had been involved.

District interviews confirmed that local standards have been developed in committee with much participation from teachers, principals, district staff, and the community. The interviews also highlighted that, perhaps because of the number of people involved, the development of standards is a lengthy process. In one of the districts in which interviews were conducted, where committees of principals and teachers developed key indicators of what students should be able to do at each level and provided examples of student work, the development of standards and assessments has been a four-year process of revisions. In fact, it is still considered an ongoing work-in-progress. A similar picture emerged in other districts that hosted interviews. Three other districts that have been involved in developing their own standards have been doing so for at least two years, and a fourth district stated that the process had taken "well over a year."

Relationship of District Standards to the State Standards

> *I know we have new state standards and also district standards that are aligned with the state.... I have the state standards but I don't really refer to them.*
>
> — *Teacher*

- **Survey responses indicated that district standards were based on the state standards, but some districts developed their local standards prior to the adoption of the state standards.**

Over 90 percent of survey respondents indicated that the state standards (the English/Language Arts and Mathematics Content Standards adopted by the State Board of Education in 1997) served as one of the bases for district content standards. No other sources were cited even remotely as often as the state standards. (The second most frequently cited basis was the NCTE or NCTM standards, which about 30–35 percent of districts identified.) Many districts, however, developed local standards *prior* to the state adoption and subsequently *revised* their standards so as to be more consistent with the state standards.

- **Although districts may consider their standards to be at least as rigorous as the state standards, this judgment may not always be accurate.**

When the state standards were adopted, districts that had already developed their own standards were charged with comparing their standards with the new state standards. If their standards came out "less rigorous" than the state's, districts were faced with a choice: abandon the standards they had developed and adopt the state standards instead, or revise their local standards to align them with the state standards.

Over 85 percent of survey respondents reported that their districts had either compared the district standards to the state standards for rigor or had simply adopted the state standards.[1] As for the results of the comparisons, 90.6 percent of these respondents reported that the district standards in English/language arts had been found to be "as rigorous" or "more rigorous" than the state standards. For mathematics, the figure was a bit lower; 80 percent of districts reported existing district standards as rigorous or more rigorous than the state standards. (A couple of respondents identified eighth grade algebra as the reason for the disparity.) These findings are consistent with the CDE review of the 190 accountability plans, in which only 11 percent of districts were found to have local standards that did not appear to be aligned with or as rigorous as the state standards.

An independent analysis of a small sample of district standards, however, revealed that districts' appraisals of rigor may have been overly optimistic. Standards from five districts were reviewed in comparison to the state standards; of these five districts, four had returned the survey. Of these four, two reported on the survey that their district standards were more

[1] Survey districts did not, however, provide much detail about how exactly the comparison was made. The most common response (provided by over 60 percent of respondents) was along the lines of, "A district committee compared the existing local standards with the state standards." Another 26 percent replied that they had either adopted the state standards in their entirety or had used the state standards as a guide in the development of their local standards.

rigorous than the state's. The independent analysis concurred. For the other two, however, opinions diverged. Both of these two districts reported on the survey that their local standards were as rigorous as the state's. The independent analysis, however, found that both districts were less rigorous. (See box.)

How Local Standards Compare with the State Standards: An Independent Analysis For Five Districts

The mathematics and language arts standards of five districts were compared to the state's documents for grades 3, 4, 7, and 8.[2] The standards were compared according to the state's definition of rigor — breadth, depth, pace of learning, and levels of performance.[3]

Findings in Mathematics

- At grades 3 and 4, three districts' standards appear to be less rigorous than the state's in terms of breadth, depth, and pace of learning, and two districts are more rigorous.
- The two more demanding districts generally had more depth to their required standards. Both "more rigorous" districts also require more writing about mathematics and more interdisciplinary connections with mathematics.
- At the 7th grade, two districts' standards are about the same as the state's (only slightly less rigorous), one district is below, and standards in the remaining two districts' standards are above the state's standards.
- For 8th grade, two districts list "Algebra 1" standards. Another district does not have standards specifically for the 8th grade, and two districts have "Grade 8" standards. The "Pace of Learning" for both "Grade 8" districts is much slower than the state recommends.
- The state's 25 standards for algebra are less rigorous in terms of breadth than those of two of the districts. Both districts have much greater specificity than the state; one district adds standards and indicators for "Tools and Technology," "Student Accountability," and "Connections."
- In most cases, consistency in alignment, performance, and rigor of mathematics standards seems to be somewhat lacking, based on these five examples.

Findings in Language Arts

- More so in language arts than mathematics, districts seem lenient with regard to the extent to which the standards have to be met at each grade level. Two districts acknowledge that the standards are "goals" — "where we want to go" and may not necessarily be intended to "reflect a full language arts curriculum." The overall pacing between grade levels in language arts seems less rigorous, or perhaps less rigid than with mathematics.
- At grades 3 and 4 two districts appear less demanding than the state — once again they lack specificity with regards to the state's content areas. The three remaining districts are either on par with the state or a little above it. Unlike the state, these three districts make references to interdisciplinary work as well as "real world" connections.

(continues)

[2] See Chapter 4, "Methodology," for an explication of the process used in this comparison.
[3] Memo entitled *Establishing District Standards "at least as rigorous" as California's State Standards*, Standards and Curriculum Office, California Department of Education, March 18, 1998.

How Local Standards Compare — continued

- Districts that seem more demanding than the state at the 3rd grade may not be so in 4th grade because the state requires growth in each content area between the 3rd and 4th grades whereas some districts do not.
- For the 7th grade in particular, a common problem is that district standards either become less specific than the state's or too specific. The lack of specificity means less rigor (according to the state's definition), yet too much specificity leaves one to question the larger picture.
- Pacing between 7th and 8th grade is uneven and dependent upon a district's priorities. One district collapses 7th and 8th grade standards into one list which makes it doubtful that the 8th graders in that district are meeting the state's recommended standards for "Pace of Learning" even when at every other grade level the district appears to have more rigorous standards.

Overall, the five districts demonstrate the levels of confusion reigning around the status of content standards in California. Some districts obviously created standards prior to the state and later attempted to adapt these standards to meet the state's "at least as rigorous" requirements. Other districts seem to have continued using their local standards without much attention to the State Board's action.

Perhaps even more importantly, this analysis reveals the difficulties involved in making determinations of rigor. Shades of meaning can make the difference in terms of breadth and depth, and in many cases, it is clear that districts simply have different priorities than the state regarding what students should know and be able to do. The question of how qualitatively differing priorities compare in "rigor" has no "right" answer.

Figure 6.2
Matrix Examining Mathematics and Language Arts Standards
Across Five Districts at Four Grade Levels

District:	1		2		3		4		5	
Grade:	*Math*	*Lang.*	*Math*	*Lang.*	*Math*	*Lang.*	*Math*	*Lang.*	*Math*	*Lang.*
3	-	-	++	++	–	--	+	+	-	✓
4	–	-	++	-	na	na	+	✓	-	✓
7	-	-	++	na	–	--	++	✓	✓	✓
8	–	-	++	na	na	na	++	--	–	✓
Overall indep. rating	–	-	++	+	–	--	++	✓	-	✓
District's survey self-rating	✓	✓	++	++	✓	✓	++	++	na	na

Key:	++	+	✓	-	–	na
	more rigorous	slightly more rigor	as rigorous as	slightly less rigor	less rigorous	not available

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- **For many districts, alignment of the local standards with the state standards is an ongoing — and sometimes daunting — process.**

Survey responses offer only a glimpse of the process that districts use to align their standards with those of the state. Among survey respondents who indicated district standards (for mathematics, language arts, or both) "less rigorous" than state standards, some commented that they had later adjusted their district standards to be as rigorous. Others wrote that their districts had decided to replace the district standards with the state standards. District interviews provided greater detail about the process of aligning district standards with the state standards.

District A

In District A, when the state standards came out, teacher committees sat down to align the pre-existing district standards with the state standards. In some instances, only slight modifications were necessary. In other instances, there were major differences between the state and district standards, and the committee decided to scrap the district version and adopt the state's instead. There was great frustration about having all that work — the development of the local standards — "wasted" as a result of state policy changes. The alignment process began two years ago, and was completed in spring 1999. The revised math standards did not pass the school board the first time and had to undergo further revisions.

District B

In other districts, alignment of the district standards with the state standards is an ongoing process. In District B, for example, the Director of Research and Evaluation commented that, although they had local standards in place before the state issued its standards, they have been adapting their standards to align with the state's. This interviewee said that they have a flexible system in which they can revise their standards whenever needed. He also said that in his opinion, the state standards are more rigorous than the local standards in some grades. (The independent analysis agreed that this district's standards, at least in their current incarnation, are less rigorous than the state's.) This was in contrast to the survey response from this same district, which indicated that the district standards were "as rigorous" as the state's.

District C

In District C, when the state standards came out, the district compared them to their own standards. An administrator who was interviewed reported that the standards were very similar in reading, but somewhat more discrepant in math, and the district is still working on aligning them.

This was a district in which school-level interviews (for the Mathematics Implementation project) also occurred, and unlike in the other districts where schools were visited, many of the principals and teachers in this district seemed familiar with the state standards and other standards, as well as with their district standards. Without being prompted to do so, many offered comparisons between the various sets of standards. One principal, for example, remarked on philosophical differences between the state standards and the NCTM standards, suggesting that the state standards focus "less on the process and more on the skills." Another principal compared the district standards to the state standards, saying that she thought the district standards were more rigorous than the state's. (The independent analysis agreed.)

Teachers in this district, too, seemed familiar with the state standards. However, they did not necessarily agree with one another on the relationship of the district standards to the state standards. One teacher, for example, said that the district standards were "more stringent and require more" than the state standards, but another teacher said that "the district standards are not as difficult as the state standards because the district standards do not have algebra, geometry, or integers." A third teacher stated nonjudgmentally that "The district has more reasoning and communications and the state has more on integers and negative numbers."

Moreover, teachers in this district did not agree on the extent to which the state standards had been used in the development of the district standards. One teacher stated that "I am accountable to my district standards, I look for the logical thinking and there's not really any state standards influence." In contrast, another teacher — who had recently finished working on performance assessments in the district office and said that he was "very involved" in standards and frameworks — remarked that the district standards were based on the state standards. A second teacher at the same school said that she was "aware that the district is trying to align its standards to state standards."

- **At the school level, there is considerable confusion and frustration about different sets of standards.**

Although principals and teachers in District C were unique among districts visited in their awareness of the different sets of standards, their confusion about the relationships between these standards was far from unique. Also, many principals and teachers used the term "standards" to refer to different documents. For example, in discussing the "state standards," some people were talking about the 1997 State Board adopted standards, whereas others were talking about the 1992 Framework. Similarly, some people used "standards" to refer to the NCTM standards; others meant the state standards; and others meant their district standards.

Indeed, several principals and teachers reported confusion and frustration about having different sets of standards (e.g., national, state, district) or about having standards constantly changing:

> *[From a teacher] At all three levels [national, state, district] we have been bombarded. When we, as the math department, were given the standards, the NCTM, state, and local standards all conflicted with each other. We adopted the NCTM standards, which used to be closely aligned with the state standards. The state standards are what we are tested on. The new state standards are very different…It seems like a moving target. Every couple of years the state comes out with a different strategy and we all change and then things change again.*

> *[From a principal] I don't think teachers are very tuned to standards. There's confusion. Our people are lost. Our standards aren't exactly the same as the state's and there's confusion about why they would have different standards.*

> *[From a principal] Teachers are confused by the standards and they ask for more specifics. They [teachers] have not seen the new standards. Also, parents have been very upset about the changes in standards.*

Implementation of the Standards in the Classroom

> *The alignment process of instruction and assessment has been an ongoing process. The discussion is now at the classroom level, and positive.*
>
> *— District Survey Respondent*

> *The state's standards seem to be covered in almost anything that we do anyway. I don't spend too much time matching individual standards with what I'm teaching.*
>
> *— Teacher*

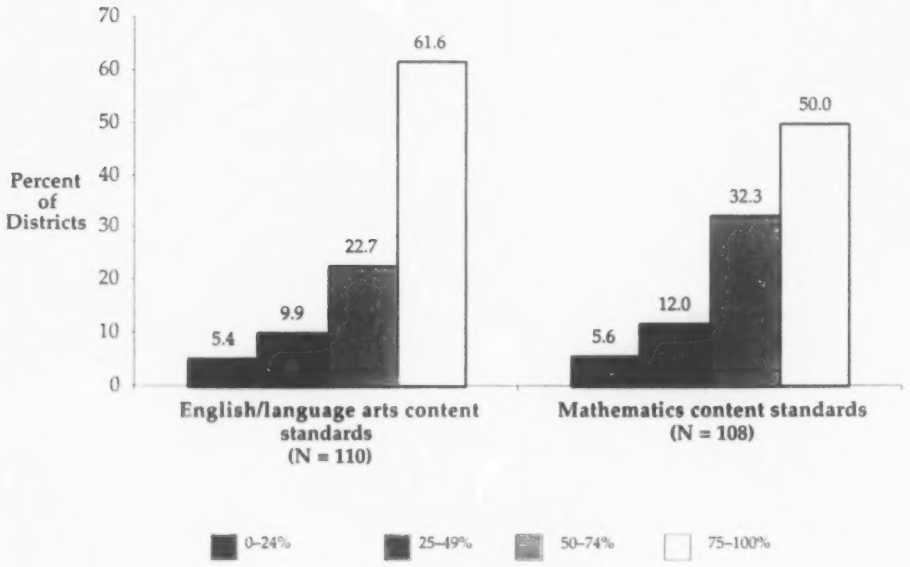
- **Impact and use of content standards is highly variable. Despite optimistic impressions voiced by district-level personnel, the standards *per se* do not currently appear to be having a high level of meaningful impact on classroom mathematics instruction.**

Even the most thoughtfully developed content standards are meaningless if they are not implemented at the classroom level — in other words, if the standards do not exert any influence on daily instruction. Most district survey respondents were optimistic about the extent to which classroom implementation of the standards has occurred. They thought teachers were further along in using the language arts standards than the math standards,

as Figure 6.3 shows. For English/language arts, 68 of 110 respondents (61.6%) estimated that 75 percent or more of district's teachers reflect the district standards in their classroom teaching. For mathematics, 54 of the 108 respondents (50%) estimated 75 percent or more of teachers. However, about 15 percent of districts who returned the survey declined to make these estimations at all.

Figure 6.3

District Reporting of Estimated Percentage of Teachers Whose Classroom Teaching Reflects District Content Standards



Both school-level observations and interviews suggested that implementation of the standards may not be at the high level suggested by the survey responses. In seven out of eight districts where school-level visits took place, impact of standards on mathematics curriculum and instruction was highly variable. (See the "District Spotlight" on the following page for a discussion of the eighth district.) This variability was across districts, across schools within a given district, and even across teachers within a given school.

For example, a teacher in one district claimed that her district's standards "are on the wall in every classroom" and said that "our jobs as teachers are linked to these standards." However, the other teacher interviewed *at the same school* said, "As for the district standards, I'm a new teacher and not aware of what they are exactly." A third teacher in this district

(but at a different school) mentioned that teachers were required to provide evidence that they met standards. Yet another teacher in the district said that they hadn't even *received* the standards. Not every district yielded quite this level of contradictory information, but, by and large, there was not a great deal of consistency in remarks regarding standards.

Given the lack of consistency and the high level of confusion, it is not surprising that overall, direct impact of the standards on curriculum and instruction appeared to be relatively low, or, at best, somewhat superficial in most of the districts visited. Although several teachers did say that they follow — or try to follow — standards in their teaching, many other teachers interviewed did not mention standards at all or mentioned them only minimally.[4] For example, when asked "How do you decide what mathematics to teach?" the majority of teachers did not mention standards. One of the more common responses was along the lines of "I follow the textbook." To the extent that textbooks are aligned with standards, then, instruction also may be aligned with the standards, but alignment of the text with the standards cannot be assumed. (This will be discussed further in the following section.)

A few teachers suggested that the standards (district or state) "did not apply" to them or to their students, for one reason or another (for example, teachers of special education or experimental courses). Other teachers mentioned that they were aware that standards existed, but that they had not read them or did not use them systematically.

District Spotlight: Mathematics Content Standards That Matter

In one of the eight districts where school-level visits occurred, the district's content standards have clearly exercised a powerful effect on schools and teachers. Every teacher interviewed in this district (6 total) talked about the content standards and the impact of the standards on curriculum and instruction. For example, when asked, "How do you decide what mathematics to teach?" standards figured prominently in the answers of five of the six teachers, and the sixth teacher implied the same in the answers to other interview questions.

(continues)

[4] Several teachers who did not mention district "standards" *per se* did mention other district curriculum guidelines such as scope-and-sequence documents, timelines, benchmarks, or checklists. (Such comments were particularly frequent in two of the eight districts.) To some extent, the documents mentioned may resemble or serve some of the same purposes as content standards; one teacher said that the district scope and sequence gave "expectations for each grade level." Another teacher remarked that a district timeline essentially tells him "what to teach at what time to make it through the year, or what they expect to be covered by such-and-such a time throughout the year."

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District Spotlight — continued

The principals at the schools in this district also had a very high level of awareness of the standards. At one school, the principal said she thought that mathematics instruction was "clearly being driven by [district] standards" and mentioned that her school is piloting the new district report card, which focuses heavily on reading and mathematics standards. Another principal stated that curriculum is "absolutely dictated" by the district-developed standards, although teachers "have freedom" in how to teach them. She also mentioned that she thought the standards had helped with student achievement by allowing teachers to clearly communicate to parents where their children were and where they needed to go.

A principal at a third school in the district also commented that she thought the standards had had a major positive impact and made a direct difference in the classroom. She indicated that standards help her "talk to teachers," since she can better see what teachers are covering and what they should be covering, and she thinks that standards set up a positive atmosphere of peer pressure to produce good outcomes. She reported that all students have copies of the standards in their binders, and teachers link back to them during lessons. The classroom observer did not directly confirm this, although in a different school in the same district, the observer noted an explicit emphasis on standards and teaching to them. According to the observer, the teacher referred to the standards when describing what he was doing and why he was doing it. Additionally, the teacher had all the standards printed and laminated, and had them hanging on the wall, covering at least an eighth of the wall space.

A district administrator commented that overall, the standards had had a very positive impact on instruction; he thought that one of the consequences of the standards and assessment system has been increased consistency and focus in the classroom. He also remarked that the standards have sparked a district-wide discussion about what should be taught, how it should be assessed, and what an acceptable level of performance was. Moreover, he reported an increased continuity in content and in expectations. He did, however, note that while elementary schools have been highly committed to the standards, the response has been somewhat weaker in the middle and high schools.

Although neither district-level nor school-level interview protocols explicitly asked for opinions about the state standards, some interviewees did volunteer such opinions. A few were positive. For example, one district-level administrator said he thought that the state standards were more useful than the district standards because they were more specific. And a teacher in a different district commented, "The state standards have had the most impact on me — they give me direction."

Most comments, however, were less positive. Several districts felt that the state standards are unrealistic — that they cover too much material, include irrelevant material, or are not grade-level appropriate. This was true of both small rural districts and large urban districts.

For example, in an interview in a small district that adopted the state standards without modification, a district-level official reported that the teachers are overwhelmed by the amount of material they have to cover and feel unable to teach all of it to mastery. In another district, district-level administrators indicated that teachers, particularly at the middle school level, felt that the state standards wouldn't fit into the timeframe of the school year and that some of the items were not important.

That middle school teachers were concerned about the state standards was supported by findings from the school-level interviews done in conjunction with the Mathematics Implementation Study. A particular concern, spanning several districts, was eighth-grade algebra. "I don't understand the push," said one teacher. "Cognitively, they [students] are not ready. They just don't understand it." A teacher in a different district stated, "The state standards say that algebra should be taught to all eighth graders, I'm against it. I think it's a maturity issue. Not all kids are ready. It's too abstract for some." Another teacher mentioned being "skeptical" about eighth-grade algebra, and a principal remarked that many middle school teachers have never taught algebra before and "are nervous."

Despite these concerns, however, the large number of comments made about eighth-grade algebra — by principals and by teachers as well as by district personnel — made it clear that several districts are, in fact, preparing to implement it. As one principal put it, "I don't believe all eighth graders, and definitely not all seventh graders, are developmentally ready for algebra. However, the district has required the change. We will offer support for students during the year in the form of math lab and study club."

Alignment with Curriculum and Professional Development

> *The standards with aligned training and assessments has provided the framework for meaningful collaboration in grade levels at the school sites and developed a common language district-wide that is being communicated to students and parents.*
>
> *—District Survey Response*

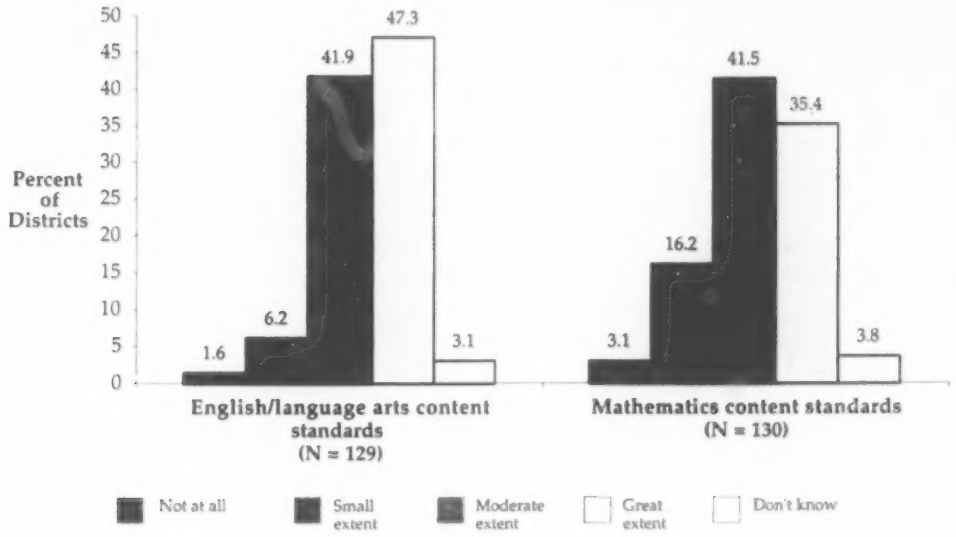
- **Alignment of curriculum with content standards lags behind standards adoption.**

When asked to rate the extent to which district-adopted instructional materials are aligned with district content standards, less than half of survey respondents (for both subject areas) indicated a "great" level of alignment, but about 40 percent indicated a "moderate" level of alignment, giving an overall rosy impression. (See Figure 6.4.) District and school-level

interviews indicated that alignment of standards with curriculum is an ongoing process, with some districts much farther along than others.

Figure 6.4

District Reporting of Alignment of Instructional Materials to Content Standards for English/Language Arts and Mathematics



In one small district, for example, an administrator mentioned that the district is in the process of developing curriculum to match the standards, and they had just purchased a curriculum software package that will allow them to review and modify the entire curriculum every two years. Teachers are told what to cover and given specific objectives and goals, but they can use whatever methodologies they please.

In a medium-sized district, the district administrators who were interviewed noted that curriculum is more aligned with standards in language arts than in math. Alignment is still in process, and, in the opinion of one administrator, it would be helped immeasurably if there were a full-time curriculum coordinator.

At the school level, current efforts to align curriculum and instruction with standards stemmed from districts, principals, and teachers. One principal, for example, spoke of how they had looked at the district standards and at the SAT-9 "to determine curriculum," and they were now planning to "break it down by quarter." A math teacher in a different district remarked:

I have modified some of my teaching style to fit what the standards are saying....There's definitely standards that are being put in place and things of that nature that have influenced my teaching....They come straight from the district. Like, the principal goes to a district meeting. And she comes back, and she says, "Okay, here's what's going on."... Like for example, at the beginning of the school year, I'm a math teacher, and so I didn't do a whole lot of writing in my class. Well, now I do tons of writing in my class, because that's part of the standard now: "Students will be able to learn to read and write across the curriculum."

This teacher, however, was also one of the teachers who said that he decided what to teach by following the book.

Indeed, curriculum materials drive the curriculum in some districts. As discussed above, many math teachers reported that curriculum materials — namely, the textbook — play the primary role in determining the content of instruction. Thus, to the extent that curriculum materials are aligned with the standards, and instruction follows the curriculum materials, then instruction is aligned with the standards. As one district administrator put it, the district had aligned its standards with the state standards, and thus instructional materials are aligned with the standards to the extent that the state-adopted materials are so aligned. And some interviewees did indicate such alignment:

[From a principal] The state framework determines the curriculum. As for the text, the principal and teachers look at the state approved books to try and meet the standards which state that by a particular age, a student must have mastery of specific skills....The school has full discretion over pacing, but we need to meet the standards.

[From a teacher] The district math standards are pretty much aligned with the book we use. They went through that whole process when they chose the book, back, like, two years ago. From what I understand — I wasn't here.... The curriculum is pretty well laid out. They tell you what concepts need to be done; you don't have to do it exactly the way it is in the book, but that's basically what you've gotta teach.

The principal at this teacher's school, however, did not take it as a given that following the district-adopted text ensured coverage of the standards. She stated:

The district is attempting to align the math standards with curriculum....Our major job next year is to align curriculum, see if we're achieving the standards, and understand what the assessments show about changes that need to be made....Our priorities are to align curriculum to standards and to do a quarterly assessment here so that the goals are set for each grade level in math.

Moreover, it cannot always be assumed that curriculum materials are aligned with the standards — especially given conflicting sets of standards. A math teacher in one district stated:

> *This year we made the transition to an algebra curriculum for eighth grade that is different than traditional algebra. This was supposed to be the transition year. Now, these books…have not been adopted by the district. They follow the old state standards and the NCTM standards, but they don't address the new state standards.*

Another teacher lamented similarly, "Math standards keep changing and how can we get a curriculum to match when it's always changing?" Yet another teacher commented that what would most help her improve her mathematics instruction would be more time and "curriculum aligned to standards." And a third teacher felt that that not enough attention was given by the school to curriculum implementation. "It would mean more meetings," she continued. Finally, one teacher stated, "I think we need to align our curriculum with the state standards because they are aligned with the SAT-9." This remark hints at the power of the SAT-9 in driving curriculum, to be discussed further in the following chapter.

District Spotlight: Aligning Math Standards with Curriculum

School-level comments about alignment of math curriculum with standards were particularly prominent in one of the eight districts visited (not, interestingly, the same district profiled above in which standards figured so prominently in interview responses). Principals and teachers at three out of the four schools visited in this district mentioned alignment efforts.

At the first school, the principal said that at the beginning of the year, the faculty had discussed the district mathematics standards and grade-level teams met to decide the goals and objectives for the year based upon the appropriate standards. They created a yearlong plan to address all of the standards, and teachers continue to work in grade level teams to plan how to meet the standards. A teacher at this school confirmed independently that the fourth-grade teachers had, indeed, met as a group to align their curriculum to the district standards.

At the second school in this district, the principal spoke of how "Standards are the basis now in the school and in the district" and stated that "the present school effort is to align curriculum to standards." (She said that the school follows the direction of the district inasmuch as the district selects the text and adopts the standards, but the school itself develops the "course of study.") A teacher at this school, meanwhile, discussed how the teachers had been "mapping" district standards to curriculum, resources, and practices. She implied that this had been a district-wide activity.

(continues)

District Spotlight — continued

The principal at the third school discussed alignment between professional development efforts and the standards, explaining that the school has an outside consultant who comes in on a monthly basis to demonstrate how to use materials and "how the materials correspond to the district standards." The relationship between the consultant and the content standards was not mentioned by the teachers at this school, but one of the teachers did discuss how, using the district and state standards as a guide, the math teachers had met and "made a list of priorities" for teaching mathematics. She said that this had been a "useful discussion" and that they had "shared methods."

- **Almost all districts report that they require teachers to engage in professional development based on their content standards, with the most common being one to three days in a given year.**

Along with curriculum, professional development is another area requiring alignment with content standards if they are going to have a meaningful impact on classroom instruction. On the survey, about 25 percent of districts reported that in a given year, they require more than three days of standards-related professional development for teachers. (One respondent noted, "Lately all days have been related to this.") On the other end of the continuum, roughly 20 percent of districts said that they require less than one day. About 50 percent of responding districts required one to three days.

Neither district nor school-level interviews focused on standards-related professional development, but, again, some interviewees did volunteer information. In one large district, a district administrator mentioned that all district-provided professional development is based on the standards. In a small district, a district administrator remarked that they had gone over the standards in staff and faculty meetings so that everyone was familiar with them. In addition, the standards were explained to parents in site councils.

In the Next Chapter

Content standards constitute one of the six key elements of an accountability system, and districts were making good progress in this area, as this chapter has shown. But if content standards are not being taught, they are an irrelevant, empty shell. Standards-aligned assessments are needed and they are the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter 7

Assessment Measures

Highlights of Findings

- **The SAT-9 is pervasive, but its influence is viewed as highly problematic by many districts and schools.**
  Not surprisingly, almost all districts cited this test as one of their accountability measures. As a mandatory, high-stakes test, the SAT-9 exerts considerable influence at the school level — affecting what professional development opportunities are offered and how classroom time is spent on test preparation. However, the SAT-9 is viewed by district- and school-level personnel as inherently flawed for the following reasons:
  - The SAT-9, in its current form, is not aligned with state standards.
  - The emphasis on the SAT-9 promotes "teaching to the test" — that is limiting the curriculum to what is on the test.
  - The "augmented" standards-based items included in the SAT-9 are considered overly difficult and unfair.
  - The requirement that all students be tested in English is unfair.
  - Testing takes valuable time from instruction.

  With regard to the Public School Accountability Act of 1999, local and school personnel expressed grave concern with the Academic Performance Index's over-reliance on SAT-9 results, particularly as the test is not fully aligned to state standards. Some believe that the emphasis on the SAT-9 may drive the education system in harmful ways.

- **Most districts use and value multiple measures, but fear they will be abandoned because of new state accountability requirements.**
  Consistent with state requirements that existed prior to the passage of the state's new accountability law, most districts report using a wide array of multiple measures, including:
  - writing samples
  - grades
  - teacher judgments, and
  - district criterion-referenced tests.

  Many district personnel express concerns that the state's increasing emphasis on the SAT-9 as the sole indicator of student performance will lead to the demise of multiple measures.

As part of the statewide Standards-Based Accountability System, the state required school districts submitting Consolidated Applications for Categorical Funding to have at least one achievement measure each in language arts and math for every grade level. In order to comply with federal mandates for Title I funding, districts also had to use multiple measures of assessment for at least one grade level in each of three specified grade spans. In addition, districts were required to establish student performance standards showing how the multiple measures would be combined to determine student proficiency. These reporting requirements first went into effect in 1997. In 1998, the state established statewide criteria for combining multiple measures and required that the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) test — the Stanford Achievement Test, 9th Edition, Form T (SAT-9) — be one of the measures used (McKenna, 1998; Fausset, 1998).

For the purposes of this study, the overarching research question on the topic of assessment was:

> ***What is the nature of local assessments for standards-based accountability and how are they used to determine whether a student has met or has not met the local standards?***

The Stanford-9

> *The SAT-9 played a large part [in influencing mathematics instruction at this school] — fortunately and unfortunately. You want to teach the kids what they will be tested on.*
>
> *—Principal*

- **The SAT-9 is the most commonly used assessment measure. It has made a significant impact on schools and teachers and in some places appears to drive curriculum and instruction.**

Given that the use of the SAT-9 is required by the state, it would be surprising to find many districts that did not include it as one of their assessment measures. Indeed, nearly all survey respondents reported that the SAT-9 is used at one or more grade levels for accountability purposes. Among district accountability plans, 90.5 percent of the 190 CDE-rated plans, and 91.7 percent of the 36 independently reviewed plans, also cited use of the SAT-9 as an accountability measure. Moreover, among the CDE-rated plans, only 6 percent were found not to include results from the STAR test for all students in grades 2–11, and only 0.5 percent (i.e., 1 district out of 190) apparently did not use the SAT-9 at all for accountability reporting.

A few district survey respondents commented about the effects of the SAT-9 on instruction:

> *Because of accountability, school staffs are modifying their instruction to address weaknesses on SAT9.*
>
> *SAT9 has created a high apprehension level on teachers and principals and community; some positive classroom results are observable.*
>
> *Use of NRTs in a public way has increased the high stakes nature of assessment and resulted in focused attention that is new.*

School-level personnel confirmed that they are aware of the SAT-9 and its importance as an accountability measure. Numerous principals and teachers spoke of such things as "living and dying by the test scores," focusing professional development efforts on improving test scores, pacing instruction so that teachers can "strategically prepare" the students for standardized tests, and "anxiously awaiting" the SAT-9 results. (Interviews were conducted before the scores were released.) One principal explained that "the SAT-9 has been the catalyst" for changes occurring in her school; "Other state policies," she continued, "have had nowhere near the same level of influence."

Indeed, in answer to the question, "Did you do anything special to help your students prepare for this year's SAT-9?," the vast majority of teachers interviewed answered in the affirmative. A few of the teachers focused on basic skills or on particular content areas as part of this preparation. More common responses, however, included work on "test-taking skills" (for example, in taking multiple-choice tests) and the administration of practice tests. Several teachers mentioned the use of test-preparation booklets/materials, although in more than one instance, these materials had not arrived in time to be used this year.

The amount of time spent specifically on SAT-9 preparation was variable. Roughly one-third of the teachers who were interviewed said they'd spent two to three weeks; about another third said one to two months or one day per week all year long. A few teachers did say that they had worked on SAT-9 preparation all year.

At many of the schools visited, the influence of the SAT-9 goes beyond preparing students to take the test and extends into the realm of shaping the curriculum itself. Without prompting, many teachers mentioned the SAT-9 in their answers to questions about their "general approach" to teaching mathematics or about documents and policies that they felt had had an impact on their teaching. "The thing that jumps to mind is the STAR-9 testing," replied one teacher; "the greatest impact comes from the Stanford-9 and [another assessment used in the district]," stated another. Responses such as these, along with "preparing students to take standardized tests," were fairly typical.

Moreover, several principals stated unequivocally that the SAT-9 will "drive the way we teach" or had already done so. Some teachers, as well, made comments about the influence of the SAT-9 over their curriculum or their instructional practices. "The test influences what I teach," explained one teacher, "I try to cover all the areas that will be on the test," she continued. In a different district, another teacher remarked that after the students had taken this year's SAT-9, she asked them what they did not know on the test; they indicated geometry, so next year she intends to bring that in earlier. More generally, this same teacher stated, "If the SAT-9 is a test of skills, not theory, then we might as well continue to teach that way."

- **District- and school-level personnel expressed grave concerns about overreliance on the SAT-9, especially given a perceived lack of alignment between the test, the standards, and the curriculum.**

> *The normed SAT-9 test has had a negative effect on teachers, students, and parents because the test is not aligned to daily instruction. Therefore teachers and students are defeated before they begin.*
>
> *—District Survey Response*

> *The new adoption for the district — there's an obvious philosophy behind it that it should be hands-on…My biggest complaint with the hands-on is that [students are] not tested that way. It's like they [the district] want us to use hands-on materials, but then they test us in a much more traditional way…Regarding the district and the state, teachers are getting mixed messages about hands-on versus seatwork. I don't get a consistent message. No one fully explains to you how you're supposed to prepare kids for tests.*
>
> *—Teacher*

Many districts' questionnaires contained remarks expressing serious concerns about the SAT-9 and the accountability emphasis placed on it. Terms such as "overreliance" and "overemphasis" turned up again and again in respondents' comments about the SAT-9. The following comments, given in response to various open-ended questions, were typical:

> *The overemphasis on a norm referenced test statewide is very problematic.*

> *Overreliance on norm-referenced test data [has hindered our district].*

In particular, many districts take issue with the centrality of a norm-referenced test in a standards-based system. The use of an NRT as part of a standards-based approach, wrote one respondent, "is somewhat unreasonable." Several survey respondents commented that

the SAT-9's lack of alignment to the state standards and to curriculum and instruction is deeply problematic, given the importance of the SAT-9 for accountability:

> *Standardized tests not aligned to standards cause problems in the implementation of standards.*
>
> *Over reliance on SAT9 (NRT) (one measure that is norm referenced instead of criterion referenced and isn't matched to standards).*
>
> *The district is concerned about…the use of a nationally normed test to rate performance on state standards.*
>
> *Student achievement is being gauged by a test NOT in alignment with State Standards.*

Some district staff made similar comments in interviews. For example, one Director of Research and Evaluation acknowledged that there had been a major change in district classrooms of late, but he attributed this change to the STAR test *rather than* to the content standards. An official in a different district expressed concerns about "mixed messages" from the state related to the use of the content standards and the SAT-9. He said that he finds it particularly difficult to explain to parents how a standards-based system works in the context of using the SAT-9 to assess achievement. He also mentioned a concern that reliance on the SAT-9 will divert instruction from the broader, more rigorous content standards to the more narrow basic skills measured by the test. Similarly, one district survey respondent wrote, "C & I practices are harmed by forcing a narrowing of learning outcomes to testable areas."

At the school level, as well, many people commented on a perceived lack of alignment between the test and the content standards. For example, one principal said that "we have no measure" for determining if a student meets the district standards, implying that the SAT-9 does not serve this purpose. Another principal mentioned that there had been "some resistance to the SAT-9 because it is not aligned with the standards." As an example, she pointed out that in social studies, seventh graders are tested on U.S. history, but they do not take U.S. history until eighth grade. She expounded further with regard to mathematics:

> *Do [the district math] standards align with the standardized tests that [students] have to take? No. They don't. And that's very frustrating for math teachers. What we're teaching and when we're teaching it, and when they take the standardized tests and they see that something is on there that they haven't taught yet — it's very frustrating. … Aligning our state testing with our standards is really important, so we don't have that frustration.*

Another principal in the same district said that there had been much anxiety in her school over the STAR program; she said that the teachers were worried that the kids were being

tested on topics not taught. A principal in a different district made a similar comment, about teachers seeing "a discrepancy" between things on the test and things that are taught.

Several teachers, too, remarked on the lack of alignment between the test, the curriculum, and the standards. "The Stanford-9 test material is not in our curriculum!" bemoaned one teacher. Another spoke of how the SAT-9 was a "more traditional" approach that does not mesh with the curriculum. Other teachers mentioned that "it would be helpful" to have assessments that were aligned to the new standards. "The test doesn't assess what's going on here," stated one teacher; "The SAT-9 is not a good judge," said another.

- **At the classroom level, many teachers feel that they are being compelled to "teach to the test," a particular problem if the test is not aligned with the standards.**

As suggested by the remarks from people who say that the test is driving curriculum, it appears that many schools and teachers are adapting instruction to fit the test. But many teachers strongly object to the idea of "teaching to the test," though they fear that ultimately they will be asked to do so. As one teacher put it:

> *I don't really believe in teaching to a standardized test. I think that too much importance is placed on them. At the same time, I'm tugged in that direction, because everybody thinks it's important....So, I have to honor it.*

Another teacher stated strongly, "The SAT-9 is going to have a negative impact. It really controls teaching and what is taught." Other teachers particularly objected to the idea of "teaching to a test" that is not aligned with the standards:

> *I get the impression from the state government that we need to teach to the test. I mean, who cares about content anymore in the math class? We teach to the test. Because now they [the state government] are offering extra money tied to teachers whose test scores are high. And, so that speaks very loudly that...it doesn't matter about the content, let's teach to the test....I'm not going to, but that's what I'm hearing, and I'll bet you that, in time, the department will force me to do that....I think the standardized test that we have to take gets in the way. Because it forces me to teach to the test, instead of teaching to what the standards are.*
>
> *There's a lot of pressure to make sure students perform well on [the SAT9]. And personally, I think if the curriculum is strong and you teach the curriculum, then you don't have to worry about the individual test. But, I'm kind of shouting out in a field by myself on that. Or, at least, there are a lot of teachers shouting out there, and other people aren't listening. And I just fear that we're moving too much toward teaching to a test. It's not ever been stated that way, but I think it's moving in that direction. I avoid it [teaching to the test], thinking that the strength of the*

curriculum will do the job. And, I don't know what I'll have to do if the results aren't good, and I have to revise what I do. Because, I think, then the task is, change the curriculum…I think the problem we have right now is that the test and the curriculum are based on different standards, and they haven't brought them in line. And I'd like to see the test follow the curriculum — or, decide what the curriculum should be, establish the statewide standards, or national standards, or whatever the heck we're going to use, and then make sure the test follows that. And not the other way around. I don't want a curriculum chasing the test. I want the test to match the standards. And I don't think we're anywhere near there yet….

Some principals also expressed concerns about curriculum driven by assessment. One principal commented that looking at test scores might help improve the scores, but that this did not necessarily mean improving the curriculum. Another principal said that she worries that as teachers teach more and more narrowly to the tests, important things are getting left out of children's education. For example, until the state starts testing science and social studies, she speculated, schools will concentrate almost exclusively on math and language arts. Previously, this principal remarked, she would have felt accountable to parents to give children a well-rounded education, but she now feels accountable to the district (who in turn is accountable to the state) to provide high scores. She thought that this sometimes gets in the way of giving the kids the best possible education.

Interestingly, some of the same concerns were expressed during interviews by officials within the California Department of Education. Department staff observed that the STAR test has the very real potential to cause schools to narrow curriculum and instruction in order to maximize student performance on the test. Some argued that raising test scores on this one standardized test is not synonymous with improving education, as it is possible to raise test scores without improving student learning. The comment was also made that no matter how prominently state standards are endorsed, unless they are assessed, it is unlikely that they will be taken seriously in many school districts.

- **Although the augmented portion of the SAT-9 may be more aligned with the standards than the rest of the SAT-9, the use of the augmented test in spring 1999 caused considerable anguish among districts, schools, teachers, and students.**

  This year the state augmented test — there were things on there that people thought were really not being taught. So does that mean they change their curriculum? I don't think so…there's a lot of resistance to that.

  —Principal

At least in theory, the use of the new "augmented," standards-based sections of the SAT-9 may alleviate some of the concerns that people have about lack of alignment between the test and the standards. However, it appears that considerable progress remains to be made with the use of these new sections. According to sources within the California Department of Education, some of the augmented items failed to meet technical standards of validity and reliability. And at least one district survey respondent complained that "poor augmented test items" had been a hindrance in the development of an accountability system.

Several school-level staff and teachers objected to the augmented sections of this year's test as well. One principal remarked, "the augmentation portion was a bust"; she said that the test "set the students and teachers up because the expectations were not matched by what students found on test." Another principal said merely that the augmented test had "caused confusion." And the following remarks were made by teachers in two different districts, the first one an elementary school teacher and the second one a middle school teacher:

> *I was really upset by the augmentation test. The students were asked to work with negative integers. I didn't teach them that.*
>
> *The SAT9 tests a lot of stuff that they haven't even learned…The problem is that we're supposed to be aligned with the state test. And so, that means basically we need to advance all our students before they're ready….The 7th graders had to take this test, the STAR test…While they were taking it, I could just see the frustration on their faces, and I was like, what's going on? So I grabbed a copy of the test. I started looking at it; I was like, oh my gosh, they're so frustrated because this is the stuff I'm teaching my 8th graders right now, but my 7th graders haven't even seen this material yet.*

This teacher said that as a result of this experience, next year he plans to move content down from the 8th grade to the 7th grade to the "best of his ability." Similarly, another teacher said, "I don't believe in teaching to the test but it's not fair for a child not to have exposure to what's on the test." She indicated that next year, she will add new topics to her curriculum — those on the augmentation test — so that students have exposure to them.

In this way, then, the use of the augmented portions of the SAT-9 may indeed be having the effect desired by the state: they are spurring teachers to teach particular content at levels they otherwise would not have. To the extent that this content is indeed aligned with the standards, then the test is encouraging standards-based instruction. As one principal put it, "[The augmented test] has really been an issue with our math teachers, because they feel that it's out of reach of most students. But maybe that's the purpose of it: make it within reach."

The time at which the test is administered, however, also plays an important role on how much of the content students have covered.[1] One teacher stated that although the test was given in the early spring, it focused on the last third of the year's curriculum, and the class simply "hadn't gotten to a lot of those topics yet." Another teacher, interviewed toward the end of the school year, said that her class had covered several more standards since the test was given, as a result of the way the book was set up. She hypothesized that if her students could "take the [augmented] test today, they could get at least ten more right." As it was, however, she stated, "The SAT9 was extremely frustrating — it was a whole week of upset and tears" for her students, whom she said are among the best at her school. She teaches five gifted classes.

- **Many district and school staff object to the requirement that *all* students, especially English language learners, take the SAT-9.**

About 40 percent of the 190 plans reviewed by CDE used as one of their multiple measures a primary language NRT. Nevertheless, *all* students are required by the state to take the SAT-9 in English — including English language learners, even if they are also taking a primary language NRT.

Several districts raised concerns about this requirement. In a general open-ended question on the survey about what state-level practices had hindered districts in developing and implementing their accountability systems, the following responses were among those given:

> *English SAT-9 for ELs*
>
> *Testing non-English speaking LEP students with SAT-9 who are not Spanish speaking.*
>
> *Requiring non-English speakers to take a test in English*
>
> *Requiring all LEP to take SAT-9*
>
> *The requirement for non-English speakers to take the test in English.*

One survey respondent elaborated a bit on how the policy had been problematic for her district:

[1] This may be a particular issue for districts or schools that have year-round calendars. The Director of Research and Evaluation in one large district said that his district's track system does not fit well with the state's mandated testing window, leaving students in some tracks with up to 40 days less instruction before being tested.

Requirement to test all Limited English Proficient students in the SAT-9 yield invalid scores (student & school) and thus makes it difficult for us to compare schools since the student populations tested are so different.

This survey respondent was not the only person to express concern that the SAT-9 does not take into account differences between schools or students. A similar remark was made by a principal at an overcrowded urban school in which 58 out of the 79 teachers on staff last year were "newly installed":

The measures of accountability (Stanford-9) do not account for the context of the school. There isn't much parent support because most parents have little or no education. The average teacher expectancy is 3 years. There is a high teacher turnover. The accountability to the district through the Stanford-9 doesn't measure progress within a particular context. The playing field is not level.

A few teachers, as well, voiced concerns that the SAT-9 was not sensitive to matters of equity. One stated, "The state constraints are based on tests only with no focus on reality. The SAT-9 was designed for upper middle class with no ethnic diversity." Another teacher was more concerned about the repercussions for *her* of certain students taking the SAT-9:

Some kids [e.g., English language learners, special education students] shouldn't have to take the standardized test, and if they still have to, and those scores are counted into my scores, into my teaching, and I'm held accountable for that, then I kind of have a problem with that....And the other factor is transience. I mean, there's a lot of kids who bounce from school to school to school, and if I have not taught them all year long, it doesn't seem fair to me to be held accountable for them.

Grades, Teacher Judgment, and Writing Samples

- **Other frequently used assessment measures include report card grades, teacher evaluation and judgement, and writing samples.**

On the district survey, more than 80 percent of respondents said that their districts use report card grades at one or more grade levels for accountability purposes, and 55 percent use some form of teacher evaluation/judgment. The CDE review of 190 plans found that 65.3 percent of districts were using grades as a measure; the independent review of 36 plans tallied 80.6 percent using grades and 13.9 percent using teacher evaluation/judgment. Also frequently mentioned were writing samples (86.3% of survey districts, 46.8% of CDE plans, 44.4% of independently reviewed plans).

Such widespread use of these types of measures may be cause for concern, given that they seldom are tested for reliability and validity across classrooms and schools. Indeed, nearly one-quarter of districts reported on the survey that they do not use *any* process to ensure that class grades are consistent and comparable across district schools. Among districts that do have such processes, 48.1 percent said that the district issues a grading policy or guidelines. The rigor and implementation of such policies, however, may be suspect; in some districts, these "policies" may be little more than pieces of paper. But in one interview district, where teacher judgment is one of three measures used to assess student mastery of standards, there have been significant efforts to obtain consistency in the use of this measure. Teachers are provided with training on how to judge student work within a framework of four levels of student proficiency: advanced, proficient, approaching proficiency, and below proficiency.

Another process cited by many survey respondents (47.3%) for ensuring consistency and comparability of grades was the comparison of student achievement on multiple assessment measures for triangulation of data. However, this, too, may be problematic, or even undesirable. One Director of Research and Evaluation had the view that multiple measures should be measuring different things; otherwise there is no reason to use more than one measure. He supports the use of grades as one of the multiple measures and cited evidence that teachers base grades on the kinds of things he feels are important in assessment. In his district, the correlation between grades and test scores has not been very high (around 0.3 or 0.4); this is viewed as evidence that grades and tests are measuring different things. He acknowledged that a high stakes accountability system might lead to grade inflation, but said that he has not yet seen this happen.

One possibly promising direction in terms of the use of grades as a measure in a standards-based accountability system lies with the notion of standards-based report cards. On the survey, a few districts wrote that they are in the process of developing a standards-based report card, and a couple of the interview districts mentioned this as well. In fact, the district discussed just above — the one that values grades as a measure — is working on aligning student report cards with standards.

Another interview district was farther along in the use of standards-based report cards. New grade books were developed to capture student progress in meeting standards at the elementary school level, and elementary schools are currently using standards-based report cards. These report cards have been called "pilot versions" for the past four years in order to avoid too much controversy, but, according to parent surveys within the district, 93 percent of parents are in support of the standards-based report cards. According to the district staff and principals, teachers were wary of the standards-based approach at first but for the most part have since come to embrace it. The district plans to tailor the report cards for quarterly reporting, after determining where students should be in meeting standards at various points during the year.

Criterion-Referenced Assessments

- **Many districts have developed or purchased their own criterion-referenced assessments — a difficult, expensive, and time-consuming process.**

Many districts also reported using criterion-referenced assessments both in English/language arts (55.7% of survey districts, 55.8% of CDE plans, 52.8% of independently reviewed plans) and in mathematics (57.3% of survey districts, 54.7% of CDE plans, 50% of independently reviewed plans).

Three of the districts in which researchers conducted interviews, including the two smaller ones, developed or purchased assessments to use as one of their multiple measures. For example, one of these districts developed an assessment system for reading based on an existing model; it is an in-depth diagnostic tool given three times a year to all students in grades 1–8, and it covers eight reading subcategories. For mathematics, this district bought for diagnostics a commercial assessment that is aligned to the SAT-9. The results of the diagnostics are supposed to be used by teachers to help guide instruction for individual students and are also used in parent-teacher conferences.

Several survey respondents seemed proud of locally developed assessments and indicated that the use of these assessments is having a positive impact on classroom instruction:

> *District-made K–3 reading assessments are guiding instructional practices in the classroom.*
>
> *District Writing Assessment is scored with a rubric that is now included in classroom instruction. Teachers report positive impact.*
>
> *What is tested is taught. We've taken great care to develop assessments. Staffs work together to analyze results of assessments. We can now hold teachers accountable.*
>
> *Assessments have been developed or identified and purchased that teachers are using to monitor student achievement in reading and writing K–5, and they are using assessment results to plan instruction.*

However, district interviews revealed that the development of local assessments can be a difficult, expensive, and time-consuming process. Staff from one district, for instance, mentioned that the district has spent a lot of time developing multiple measures and has had great difficulty in coming up with valid, reliable tests. The district eventually bought a test bank from a publisher, but it still needs to develop assessments for each grade. (They would like to be able to hire a full-time Assessment Director to develop the measures,

oversee the student data tracking system, and evaluate the data.) Staff from this district also mentioned that committees of district staff, principals, and teachers have been scrambling to develop a mathematics assessment for each primary school grade. They did not have the capacity to create what they felt was a good, reliable and valid test, but they felt they had no choice because it was required for Consolidated Application reporting.

Conversations with representatives from rural districts indicate that such districts are particularly concerned about their capacity to develop assessment and data analysis systems. Some districts feel it is beyond their capacity to develop assessment systems, and would like to see the state offer an array of approved, valid, and reliable options.

Although locally developed assessments may have some of the same types of reliability and validity problems that grades and teacher judgment have, most districts are aware of these problems. Indeed, 111 of 114 survey districts (97.4%) reported that they provide professional development for teachers on the use and/or scoring of locally developed assessment measures. In one district that uses local assessments, the Director of Research and Evaluation reported in an interview that assessments are scored both by the classroom teacher and centrally by the district; any discrepancies are given to a third reader.

An official from a different district noted that designing a reliable and valid test was not the only problem. In his opinion, getting consensus on what should be measured was even more difficult. Although this issue sparked a productive community-wide debate on what students should know and how that should be measured, this debate prolonged an already-lengthy development process. Because the district had to meet state reporting deadlines, the multiple measures were implemented before they were completed to everyone's satisfaction. Though the measures continue to be refined, the district now has to overcome the negative reaction of the teachers, parents, and students, who rebelled against the hastily designed assessments. In addition, since the assessments change each year, the district has not been able to establish baseline data against which to benchmark progress.

- **Testing takes time away from instruction.**

Another area of concern with regard to assessment is the amount of class time needed to administer and prepare for tests. A comment on one district's questionnaire was that "Teachers are concerned about the amount of classroom time being lost to assessment," and this was generally supported in interviews with school-level personnel. One principal, for example, was concerned that too much time was being devoted to testing, and that it was cutting into instruction time. And a teacher in a different district said he thought that the district assessment, given three times over the course of the year, "was a little much":

> *We lost three instructional days, plus whatever preparation we were doing for it. And then also, it took some time to grade the papers, all that kind of stuff, which took away from my preparation*

time as well....So I thought it was a little much...to do three of them; I felt it would be better if it was just one.

Some teachers said that they had stopped what they were doing in order to prepare students for assessments (including the SAT-9), and a few of them resented having to do this. As one teacher put it, "It [test preparation] slowed me down with respect to my regular instruction."

Also, some teachers voiced concerns not only about the amount of time required to prepare for and to give assessments, but the particular scheduling of these assessments, as indicated by the following comments from two teachers at one school:

I mean, it's really hard, because, like, we'll get a test coming up, a [district] performance-based assessment test, coming up, and I'll look at it, and I'll go, "Oh, gee, we haven't even covered this yet." So I'll have to stop what I'm doing, cover this material, so that they can do well on the performance-based assessment test. And then go back to my regular material.

The district has had...performance-based assessments that we had three times this year...And I have no trouble doing performance-based assessments, but when it comes from the district, it doesn't necessarily fit with what you're doing at the time. I'd rather have an assessment that goes along with what they [students] are doing....It was like, just take this chunk out of time, and do this thing that's not associated with what you're teaching.

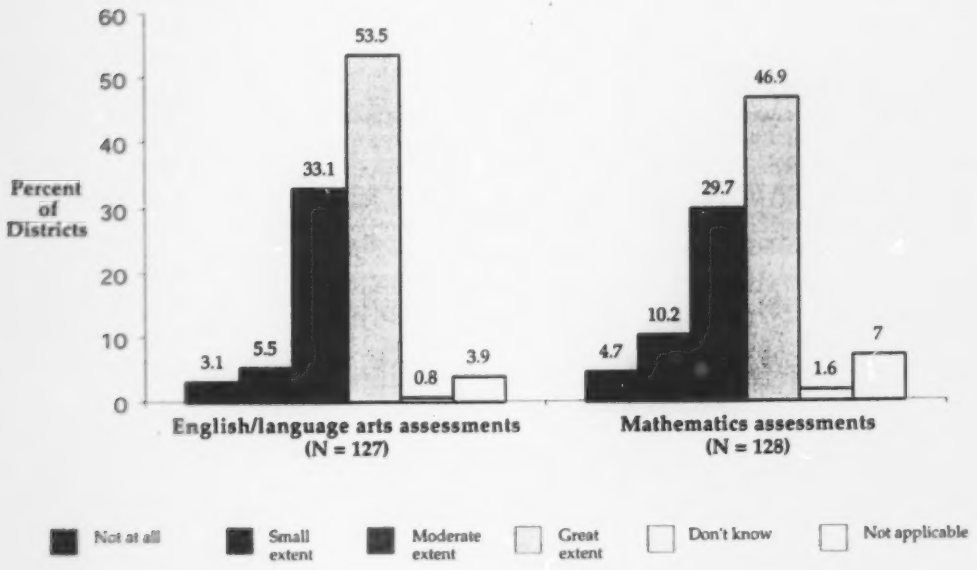
- **Districts report that they are working to align local assessments with their district standards. About 50 percent of surveyed districts report significant alignment of local assessments and district standards in English/language arts and mathematics.**

Ideally, local assessments should be aligned with content standards. To the extent that district assessments are used for accountability purposes and thereby help drive instruction, the use of standards-aligned assessments bodes well for standards-based instruction. Figure 7.1 shows that over 50 percent of survey respondents said that district English/language arts assessments are aligned with district content standards to a "great" extent (33.1 percent reported a "moderate" extent); for mathematics, 46.9 percent of respondents reported alignment to a "great extent" (with 29.7 percent citing a "moderate" extent).[2]

[2] District reporting about alignment may have been overly optimistic; these data have not been verified.

Figure 7.1

District Reporting of the Extent to Which District Assessments are Aligned with District Content Standards for English/Language Arts and Mathematics



For some districts, the development of standards and aligned assessments has been a parallel, or even an iterative, process. For example, one district in which researchers conducted interviews found that it had to reassess its standards after piloting district assessments, since several of the standards proved too difficult to measure.

Use and Combination of Multiple Measures

- **Many districts have developed multiple measures for every grade level, going beyond the state requirements.**

As discussed in Chapter 5, 62.4 percent of district survey respondents indicated that their districts had "fully implemented" the use of multiple measures to determine whether students meet grade-level standards. Similarly, the CDE review of 190 district accountability plans found that 69.5 percent of districts employed multiple measures in the required grade spans. More strikingly, only 6 percent did not include multiple measures in at least one grade level within the three IASA grade-level spans (grades 3–5, 6–9, and 10–12). The

independent review of 36 plans, meanwhile, found that 80.6 percent of districts employed multiple measures in the appropriate grades.

Many districts, moreover, appear to have gone beyond the requirements and have instituted multiple measures in all or most grade levels. The CDE-reviewed plans indicated that 38.4 percent of districts employed multiple measures at *all* grade levels, and separately commended about 25 percent of the plans where districts had "exceeded the minimum requirements and [had] multiple measures at all or most grades." The independent plan review identified 58.3 percent of districts whose plans indicated multiple measures in all or most grades.

Two of the districts where interviews took place had also substantially exceeded the state multiple measures requirements, employing three measures. For one district (which was developing standards and multiple measures well before the state requirements were in place) the measures were the SAT-9, a district assessment, and teacher judgment. For the other district, the measures used were a standardized test, grades, and a writing sample scored with a standardized rubric.

- **Districts appreciated the state guidelines on combining multiple measures, although some expressed frustration about the timing.**

Once districts have selected the measures they will use, they must figure out how to combine them to determine whether students meet minimum criteria for proficiency, and they must also decide what those criteria will be. Among the 190 CDE-rated plans, nearly 25 percent of the plans did not explain how the results from all measures were combined at the student level to determine if the student meets standards. Similarly, 7 of the 36 independently reviewed plans (19.4%) included no mention of how scores were combined to determine whether students meet standards.

As for districts that did discuss the combination of measures, 47.9 percent of the CDE reviewed plans (and 63.9 percent of the independently reviewed plans) used the CDE compensatory model.[3] The CDE conjunctive model, meanwhile, was used by 22.1 percent of the CDE plans (and only 5.6 percent of the independently reviewed plans). A weighted model was used by 13.2 percent of the CDE reviewed plans and 19.4 percent of the independently reviewed plans.

As with content standards, a number of districts had already started to develop a method of combining measures by the time the state came out with its guidelines. Some of these

[3] In the compensatory model, a student's low performance on one measure can be offset by high performance on another. In the conjunctive model, students must score at or above certain absolute cut-off points on all measures to be considered as meeting grade-level standards (School and District Accountability Division, CDE, 1998, Spring).

districts thus had to revise their systems. This was discussed in several interviews. One district, for example, used in their first year of multiple measures a sum-of-points system for combining the measures. The following year, the state guidelines came out, and the district adopted the state's weighting tables for combining multiple measures, with some minor modifications. District staff were annoyed about the wasted work, but they acknowledged that having a standardized system for combining measures merited the switch.

Another interview district, however, was less pleased. They spent a year developing a rubric for combining multiple measures of assessment, only to receive later the CDE memo outlining acceptable practices. The district then had to redo its entire rubric.

Assessment and the Public Schools Accountability Act

> *I would hope we're being held accountable. The problem I see is that I don't think it's [the STAR test] the one way you test for that. I think it should be just one of a variety of things. But I definitely think we should be held accountable for student performance. If not, we're not doing our jobs....I just don't think it [accountability] should be measured with one set of tests, and that's it. The kids I have...are good kids; they came in with good scores, they'll go out with decent scores; they probably could have done that no matter whether I did a good job or not. On the other hand, you can get kids that are ill-prepared, and you know, how much you can help them improve — I don't know that anybody knows, is that 5 percentage points? Is that 25 percentage points? I guess we're all wondering, what's going to be the measure of achievement? So, that's all a little iffy when the test is the thing.*
>
> —*Teacher*

- **Districts are gravely concerned about the API's reliance on the SAT-9. They fear that as a result, the test — although not aligned with standards — will drive the entire education program.**

Although the Academic Performance Index (API) established by the Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999 eventually will be composed of several measures, at present the only measure for which reliable and valid data are available is the STAR test (currently the SAT-9). Thus, for the first two years, the API will be composed solely of these test scores.

As with the previous accountability requirements, districts raise many concerns about the weight given to the SAT-9 in the new legislation. One survey respondent wrote, "Major concerns over myopic use of standardized tests (SAT-9) for all major accountability decisions." Nearly every administrator who was interviewed expressed similar concerns. One, for example, said that her "absolute primary concern" with the PSAA was "the single

indicator" (i.e., the SAT-9); another said that there is "considerable concern" about the sole measure being the SAT-9.

A few administrators said that they worry that the new system will result in teachers teaching directly to the SAT-9. As one administrator put it, the new system may help students learn answers to the test questions as teachers do everything they can to improve test scores, but even if the test scores do rise, this may not be good for students' overall education. (However, as indicated earlier in this chapter, teachers may already have been "teaching to the test" even prior to the passage of the PSAA.)

In another district, the Assistant to the Superintendent expressed regret that the district must now use the SAT-9 instead of the standardized test that they have been using, for which they have longitudinal results. Moreover, she commented, the SAT-9 is unrelated to their content standards.

The SAT-9's lack of relationship to standards also came up several times in survey respondents' written comments about the new legislation:

> *The accountability (API) proposal may run counter to standards-based reform in its emphasis solely on STAR.*
>
> *The idea of including information about attendance, days-outs and alternate assessments is very good, except that this data is currently unreliable or unavailable across the state. So, de facto we will all be forced to rely on SAT-9 which is inappropriate measure for accountability to a standard.*
>
> *We would prefer to work with local standards and assessments which align tightly with our instructional program.*

Similarly, several districts' survey comments pointed out that the SAT-9 is a norm-referenced test, and thus questioned its role in a standards-based system, suggesting that a criterion-referenced test might be more appropriate:

> *SAT-9 is not a reasonable assessment for accountability. Assessments aligned to standards are critical. CRTs are necessary for measuring accountability for standards.*
>
> *Would prefer to have criterion-reference test versus norm-referenced.*
>
> *Norm-referenced test scores are most affected by family income level and the educational attainment of the parents. We cannot influence these elements. We need a fair, criterion-referenced testing system based on the standards.*

One district's Director of Research and Evaluation mentioned in an interview that he is "somewhat concerned" about the measures of assessment that the state is developing. He supports the matrix assessment, and, in lieu of that test, supports using just the augmented sections of the SAT-9, since he feels the items on the basic-skills test are not aligned with the standards.

- **Districts value multiple measures of student achievement and do not want to see them abandoned.**

Districts are even more concerned about the weight of the SAT-9 in the new system than in the previous system, because in the previous system, the use of multiple measures offset the emphasis on the SAT-9. As such, districts particularly object to the *increased* emphasis on the SAT-9 at the expense — or *loss* — of multiple measures. Indeed, as the following survey comments illustrate, districts strongly want to keep multiple measures, both because multiple measures are useful and because considerable effort went into their development:

> *CA swinging back to dependence on standardized test only rather than multiple measures will be devastating.*
>
> *If the API replaces multiple measures, I feel that will be unfortunate. The API as well as STAR testing doesn't have the diagnostic benefit or staff buy-in of multiple measures.*
>
> *It's a shame to waste the efforts for implementing multiple measures. We will continue.*
>
> *SBX_1 is too narrow. Districts should be required to continue to report multiple measures as called for by IASA and the state's plan for Title I.*
>
> *The new X1…basically does away with multiple measures. The SAT-9 is a snapshot in time whereas multiple measures is accountability system for the entire year.*
>
> *Concerned about loss of multiple measures as an enormous amount of time and energy was expended to do a terrific job and now will go out the window! It is hard to motivate teachers and to create one program that will be later replaced by AP Index from state. Why have us do it?*
>
> *Just as we begin to assimilate multiple measures, the rules change and we start all over with an API index.*

Similar comments were made in district interviews. One administrator said that her district would like *more* multiple measures, not fewer; a second administrator in this same district said, "the more measures, the better," and felt that "fairness" measures such as socioeconomic status and mobility should also be included in any accountability system. In

another district, whose development of multiple measures predated the state requirements, an administrator thought that the new API system represents a divergence from the district's reform efforts. She said, however, that the district would continue with the development of multiple measures of student achievement and standards-based assessment.[4] In a third district, administrators mentioned that they would prefer to retain multiple measures, but are afraid to get "too far ahead" of the state, fearing "yet another shift in direction." (See Chapter 11, "Challenges and Assistance," for further discussion of "shifts in direction.")

In the Next Chapter

Bringing assessments into alignment with content standards is a necessary step in building an accountability system. Some districts perceived aligned assessments themselves as the endpoint, rather than as one step towards accountability. Many districts had embraced the practice of using multiple measures of student achievement for determining whether students had met grade-level standards, as this chapter has shown. However, it is necessary to analyze the data generated by multiple measures for districts to use assessments as a tool for continuous improvement. The use of data is discussed in the next chapter.

[4] A different administrator in this district expressed a concern that the 40 percent of API index will be based on non-academic factors such as attendance and graduation rates. He feels that these are factors that schools are largely unable to influence, so it is not fair for them to count as such a large part of the index. Other people, however, did not seem to share this concern, as reflected by comments made on the survey and in interviews.

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Chapter 8

Use of Data

Highlights of Findings

- **Districts — perhaps because of capacity factors — report that they are more likely than schools and teachers to analyze and use student performance data.** According to most districts, accountability, assessment, and curriculum and instruction personnel examine and analyze student assessment data "to a great extent." Conversely, many fewer districts report that teachers use data "to a great extent." The disaggregation of data by various factors (such as gender and socioeconomic status) is also more like to occur at district levels than at school or classroom levels. One explanation is that technical capacity to analyze data appears greater at the district level. Many districts are, however, attempting to provide school-level personnel with greater professional development opportunities on how to use and analyze data more effectively.

- **Small districts have inadequate resources to analyze and evaluate data and to assist schools and teachers in using data to improve programs.** District interviews suggest that larger districts have the expertise and technology necessary to conduct more sophisticated analyses of data.

- **According to districts, engaging in analysis of student assessment data to meet state and federal reporting requirements occurs more frequently than analyzing data to improve instruction.** Most districts report using data to satisfy reporting requirements first and foremost, and to a slightly lesser degree to improve instruction, to identify students with special needs, and to gauge performance of student subgroups. The identification of teachers who need assistance was rarely cited as a purpose of data use and analysis.

- **School-level interviews confirmed that teachers are less likely than principals and district administrators to use and analyze student assessment data.** While districts report that they are using and analyzing data more than personnel at the school and classroom level, interviews with principals indicate that they use and analyze data to a larger, yet varying, degree. Teachers, however, rarely mentioned using data at all. Thus it seems likely that the use of data has had little, if any, impact on instruction in most classrooms.

Key aspects of a strong accountability system are the assessment of whether goals have been met, the evaluation of progress, and the identification of areas for commendation or improvement. These functions require the collection and analysis of sound data about student achievement and school performance, and the dissemination of the results in ways that are understandable to all stakeholders in the educational system. Each piece of the process, however, presents challenges. A database system may need to be developed. Analysis must be conducted and then presented appropriately. Data must be accessible to all who will need to use it, and those using it must know or learn how to do so. In particular, districts and schools must have the capacity to use data to improve their educational programs, and teachers must be able to use data to inform their classroom instruction.

Unlike some other states, such as Texas, California does not currently have a statewide student data system. On the district survey, 50 percent of respondents said that a statewide student data system would help them to analyze student assessment data better. In the absence of such a statewide system, it has been left to each district to develop its own system for the collection and analysis of data.

For the purposes of this study, the overarching research question on the topic of data use was:

> ***How are data from local accountability systems used?***

Patterns of Data Use

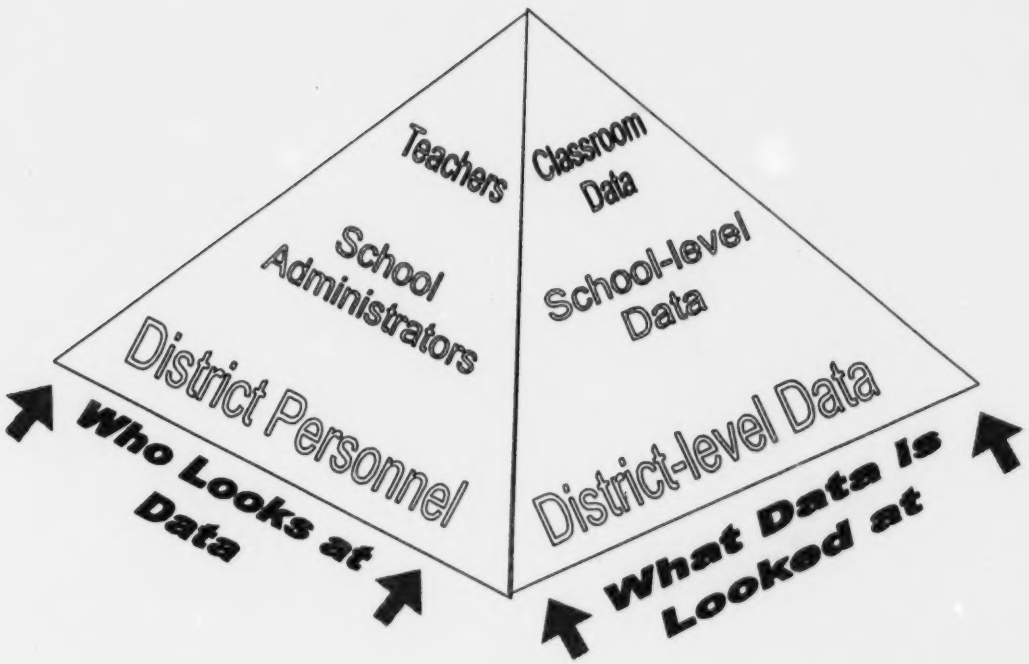
> *My goal...is that all levels of the system, particularly teachers and administrators, understand the data they get that is provided centrally, know how to supplement it with meaningful data from the site, and know how to use that information on a regular basis to change instruction.*
>
> *—District Administrator*

- **More analysis of student assessment data occurs at the district level than at the classroom level.**

Based on survey results and interviews, the analysis and use of student assessment data appears to take the form of a pyramid, with the most extensive use occurring among district-level personnel and the least extensive use occurring among teachers. (See Figure 8.1.)

Figure 8.1

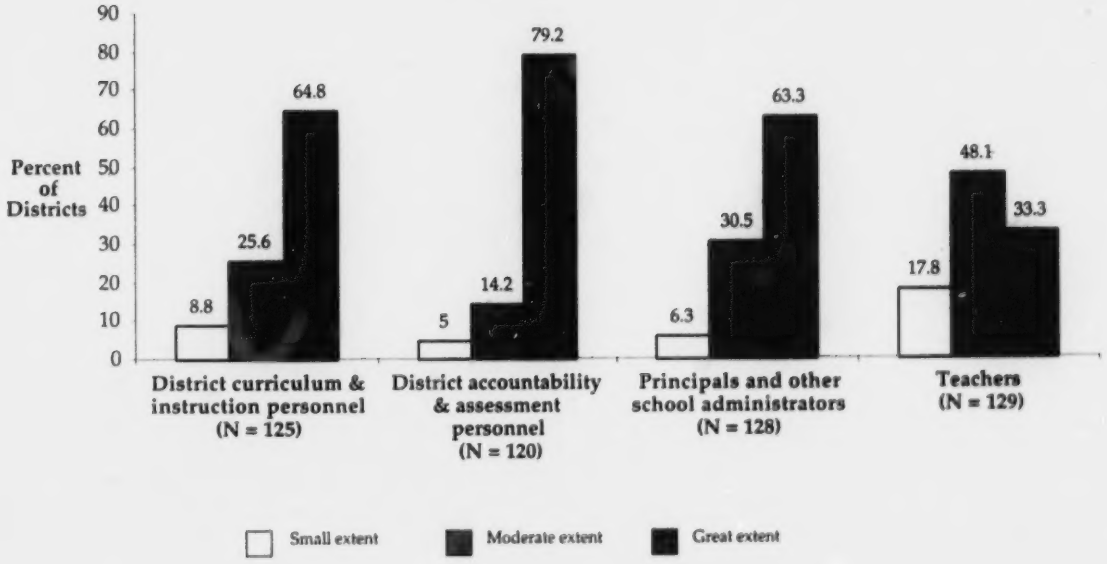
Pyramid of Use of Student Assessment Data



District accountability and assessment personnel make the most intensive use of data; 95 of 120 survey respondents (79.2%) indicated that these personnel examine and analyze student assessment data "to great extent." The next most commonly cited groups who use data "to great extent" were district curriculum and instruction personnel, selected by 81 of 125 respondents (64.8%), and principals and other school administrators (generally speaking, throughout the district), selected by 81 of 128 respondents (63.3%). Only 33.3 percent of respondents, however, said that teachers in their district examine and analyze student assessment data "to great extent." (See Figure 8.2.)

Figure 8.2

District Reporting of the Extent to Which Groups Examine and Analyze Student Assessment Data



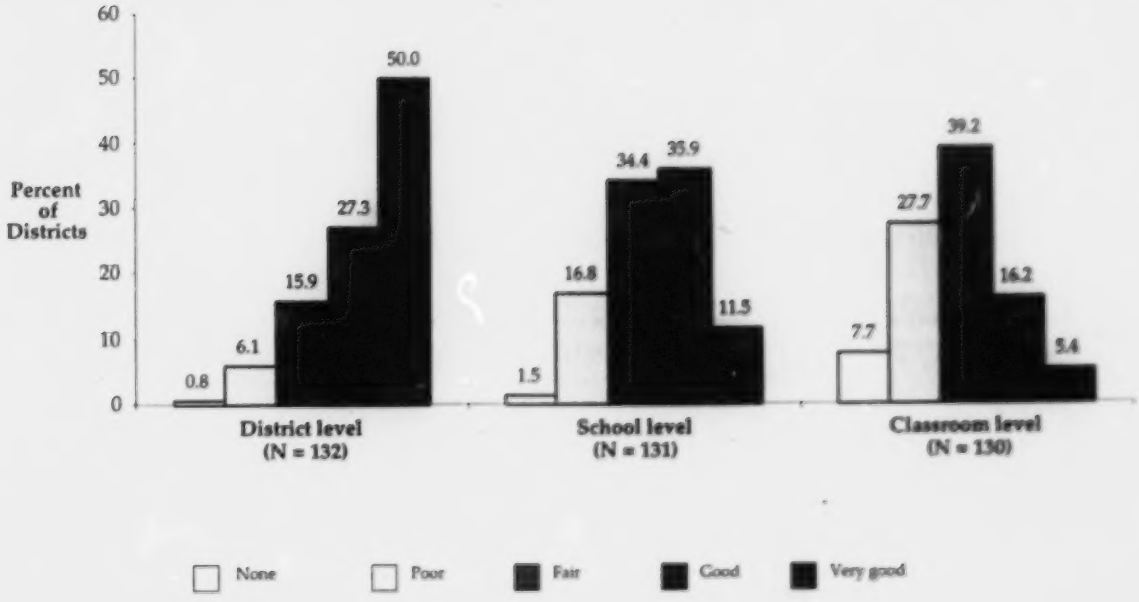
NOTE: Additionally, "Not at all" was marked once (0.8%) for the first, second, and fourth groups, and "Don't know" was marked once (0.8%) for the second group.

Figure 8.2 also shows that in nearly 20 percent of surveyed districts, teachers examine and analyze student assessment data only "to small extent."

This pattern of data use parallels survey respondents' ratings of the technical capacity for analysis of student assessment data at district, school, and classroom levels. (See Figure 8.3.) More than 75 percent of respondents rated the capacity to analyze data at the district level as "good" or "very good"; 47.4 percent rated capacity to analyze data at the school level as "good" or "very good"; and only 21.6 percent rated capacity to analyze data at the classroom level as "good" or "very good." Apparently, then, not only is teachers' use of data limited, as noted above, but the *capacity* to analyze data at the classroom level is limited as well.

Figure 8.3

District Ratings of the Technical Capacity at Three Levels within the District to Analyze Student Assessment Data



NOTE: Additionally, 5 respondents (3.8%) marked "Don't know" for the Classroom level.

Responses to survey questions about the disaggregation of student assessment data also followed the same pattern. (See Figure 8.4.) Disaggregation of data (by several different categories such as gender, race/ethnicity, and LEP) occurs most frequently at the district level, slightly less often at the school level, and substantially less often at the classroom level. For example, many respondents reported that their districts disaggregate data by gender at the district level (76.2%) and at the school level (70%). Far fewer districts reported that they disaggregate data by gender at the classroom level (38.5%). Nearly 28 percent of respondents reported that their districts do not disaggregate data by *any* categories at the classroom level, compared to only 3.8 percent and 3.1 percent of respondents reporting no disaggregation at district level and school level, respectively.

Figure 8.4

District Reporting of Categories and Levels by Which They Disaggregate Student Assessment Data

(Percent of districts)

(N = 130)

	Gender	Race/ ethnicity	SES (i.e., free, red. lunch)	Title I	LEP	Special Ed	Gifted & Talented	Migrant Status	None
a. District level	76.2	80.8	61.5	84.5	92.3	91.5	86.2	41.9	3.8
b. School level	70.0	76.9	54.6	80.6	90.0	88.5	82.3	37.2	3.1
c. Classroom level	38.5	36.2	23.1	45.4	52.3	47.7	41.5	17.7	27.7

The categories for which the highest number of districts disaggregate data are those for which such disaggregation is required for state and federal reporting: Title I, LEP, Special Education, and Gifted and Talented.[1] Disaggregation by gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (e.g., free and reduced lunch) — categories that to date have been less heavily emphasized in reporting — occurs among fewer districts.

- **Large districts have greater capacity for use and analysis of data than do smaller districts.**

District interviews suggest that district capacity to use and analyze data may be a function of the size of the district. Large districts seem to have adequate data collection and analysis capacity at the district level. In one large district that was visited, for example, the district

[1] An exception appears to be migrant status, which districts are required to report on for the Student Achievement School Report, but for which only 41.9 percent of survey respondents reported district-level disaggregation. This may be a function of many districts having negligible migrant populations.

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office gathers and reviews extensive data. They collect data about where each student is on each standard, as measured by standardized test scores, grades, teacher assessments, and a writing rubric. Data are broken down by classroom and disaggregated by factors such as gender, race, school, and LEP.

The accountability manager in another large district spoke similarly of disaggregating school-level data by gender, ethnicity, special education, gifted and talented, and socioeconomic status across all of the measures in their accountability system. She also mentioned that the district does "some additional work with the SAT-9 data" beyond what the test publisher provides. Currently the district is working on the establishment of a user-friendly system that will enable schools to access data electronically. In fact, not only will schools be able to access the data, they will be able to manipulate it, enter their own site data, ask questions, make comparisons, etc. — all whenever they want to. The district has a staff member who is working full time on programming the new system to enable schools to perform such analyses.

Smaller districts, however, indicated that they do not have enough staff for large-scale data analysis, and some feel overwhelmed by the demands on them. District personnel from one medium-sized district who were interviewed commented that, although they collect much data, they don't feel that they have the time or staff to analyze it properly or to make use of it to improve their program. On the survey, only 6 percent of districts reported that they needed no additional resources and assistance in the analysis and use of data. Over 60 percent of districts cited needs for professional development, better technology, and more staff with evaluation or statistical background. (This will be discussed further in Chapter 11, "Challenges and Assistance.")

- **Districts are trying to foster greater and more effective use of data at the school level.**

Even in districts that do have substantial data analysis capacity at the district-level, several administrators who were interviewed expressed concerns that school-level capacity is uneven, at best. In one large district, for example, an administrator explained that the district Research and Evaluation office organizes data on several different measures and reports it back to each school. This administrator, however, said he wasn't sure "how systematically" school sites used the data.

An administrator in another large district said that some district schools "are very sophisticated users of data" but others are less so:

> *We have been reading the write-ups that schools just submitted [for CCR], and found that many of our schools don't know how to talk about [data]. We thought they did — we told them. They don't know the language to use in talking. They get "percent" mixed up with "percentile" mixed*

up with "percent at or above" mixed up with "percent right"; they don't know how to talk about it. Which, obviously, if they can't articulate it, means there's a knowledge base that still needs to be built. And I need to be able to help them talk about it, because if they can talk about it accurately, they can use it better.

She then went on to say that one of her "major goals for the next year is to build that capacity." Other districts, too, indicate that they are making efforts to build capacity of school-level personnel to use data. On the survey, 94.6 percent of districts reported that they provide support or opportunities for school administrators to get professional development in how to analyze and use student assessment data, and 91.5 percent said that they provide such support for teachers.

The survey did not collect information on the nature and extent of such support and opportunities, but interviews provided a glimpse into what some districts are doing. In one district, for instance, principals receive some training in the interpretation and use of data at the annual principals' institute. Additional training is being considered.

Other districts attempt to provide professional development for teachers as well as for principals. In one such district, the Assistant to the Superintendent stated that one of the district's main goals for this year is to teach principals and teachers how to read their data; in fact, she said, teaching data skills is one of the main focuses for professional development. The Director of Research and Evaluation in this district also mentioned that some professional development opportunities on data analysis are provided to teachers, and he said that his office tries to make data reports as easy as possible to understand. This year he has received a lot more requests from teachers for classroom data than in the past, perhaps as a result of the increased emphasis on the SAT-9.

In yet another district, where teachers receive disaggregated data for their classrooms, some training is provided on how to analyze the data (although according to the administrator who was interviewed, skill levels are inconsistent). At the elementary level, training is provided to the school principal and administrators, who are supposed to pass it on to the teachers. A number of teachers are also selected to be trainers; these teachers are trained and then sent back to their school to train others.

Teachers interviewed in this district did not mention receiving professional development in the use of data, but one principal mentioned that the district provides principals with technical assistance in how to use data. He said that principals have three or four meetings per year just to go over test results with district staff and to discuss how to best utilize the data. However, one of the other principals who was interviewed in this district admitted that she has trouble working with and understanding the data. Although she thought that having and understanding the data was important, she felt that she was "not very good at it."

District-Level Purposes of Data Use

- **Districts use assessment data first and foremost to satisfy reporting requirements.**

Survey results suggest that satisfying reporting requirements constitutes the most frequent use of district-level data, as Figure 8.5 shows. When presented with a number of possible reasons why a district might collect and analyze student assessment data and asked to rate the extent of use of data for each one, districts emphasized "to satisfy state and federal reporting requirements" far more than any other listed purpose. Indeed, 74.6 percent of respondents indicated that their district uses data for this purpose "to great extent," and another 22.3 percent of respondents marked use of data for this purpose "to moderate extent."

Figure 8.5

District Reporting of Reasons the District Collects and Analyzes Student Assessment Data
(N = 130)

	District does not use data for this purpose at all	District uses data for this purpose to small extent	District uses data for this purpose to moderate extent	District uses data for this purpose to great extent
a. To satisfy state and federal reporting requirements	0	3.1	22.3	74.6
b. To design new district-wide programs for schools	2.4	29.1	45.7	22.8
c. To improve instruction in all district schools	0.8	12.3	41.5	45.4
d. To rate or rank district schools	48.4	17.5	14.3	19.8
e. To identify schools that need assistance	15.1	23.0	29.4	32.5
f. To help schools identify individual students who need assistance	3.1	14.1	35.2	47.7
g. To identify teachers who need assistance	46.8	33.3	14.3	5.6
h. To identify factors that influence student achievement	12.4	19.4	43.4	24.8
i. To gauge the performance of student subgroups across district schools.	6.4	14.4	40.8	38.4

Similarly, required reporting appeared to be the driver for disaggregation of data, as discussed in the previous section.

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- **Many districts report that they also use data to improve instruction, to identify students needing assistance, and to gauge the performance of subgroups.**

As Figure 8.5 shows, other reasons why a district might collect and analyze student assessment data that were rated highly on the survey (i.e., many districts reported using data for these purposes to "moderate" or "great" extent) included:

- "To improve instruction in all district schools" (86.9 percent of respondents);
- "To help schools identify individual students who need assistance (82.9 percent of respondents); and
- "To gauge the performance of student subgroups across district schools (79.2 percent of respondents).

Interviews provided somewhat more depth about how use districts use data for these purposes. In one small district, for example, the administrator who was interviewed said that he found immense gains in mathematics scores at the 3rd, 6th, and 9th grade levels. In an effort to improve instruction throughout the district, he then went and asked the teachers if they could pinpoint what they were doing differently and if it could be generalized.

The importance of gauging the performance of student subgroups figured even more prominently in district interviews. Disaggregation of data was mentioned by nearly every person who was interviewed. While attention to subgroup performance might be expected for the large, diverse districts where most interviews occurred, even the smallest district, with fewer than 2,000 students, has been making an increased effort to analyze disaggregated data for subgroups, according to the district's Director of Special Projects.

Interviews also highlighted the interrelationships between various possible uses of data, such as between improving instruction and gauging the performance of student subgroups. For example, one administrator from a large district commented:

> *I would like to...centrally take data across schools, just like we would like schools to do with data across kids, and find out from that data, so, what is it about reading [for example] we're not doing well across the district? Which kids, schools, populations is it that aren't doing well? Which ones are doing it well that we can learn from, particularly schools that are performing particularly well with populations that have traditionally been challenging? We have some examples of schools in our district that have huge numbers of very poor English learners that jump out with very successful student achievement results. So, what can we learn from them that might be replicable? Because the schools say, "Well you know, their kids don't look like mine." So we need to find who's doing it with kids that look like yours so we can say, "...What can we learn?"*

Areas requiring perhaps more sophisticated data analysis were rated somewhat lower, cited by 60–70 percent of respondents:

- "To design new district-wide programs for schools" (68.5 percent of respondents);
- "To identify factors that influence student achievement" (68.2 percent of respondents); and
- "To identify schools that need assistance" (61.9 percent of respondents).

♦ **The least frequently cited uses of data by districts were the identification of teachers needing assistance and the rating or ranking of district schools.**

On the survey, as shown in Figure 8.5, the lowest-rated reasons for district use of data were "to identify teachers who need assistance" and "to rate or rank district schools." In fact, 46.8 percent of districts said that they do not use student assessment data to identify teachers who need assistance *at all*, and 48.4 percent of districts said that they do not use this data to rate or rank district schools *at all*. On a later survey item, only 28.6 percent of districts said that they use an index or formula to rate the performance of schools in the district. Teacher contracts may prohibit districts from using student data in judging teacher performance, but the infrequent use of student data to rate or rank schools within a district is somewhat of a surprise. In order to hold all schools accountable, districts would seem to need to know which schools were doing a good job and which were not.

School-Level Purposes of Data Use

♦ **According to districts, schools use data to identify areas for improvement but not to make decisions about individual teachers.**

As discussed earlier in this chapter, many districts are attempting to foster a higher level of data use and analysis at the school level beyond what schools already are doing. The district survey investigated current *school-level* use of student data by listing a number of possible reasons why a *school* might collect and analyze student assessment data, and asking (district) respondents to "rate the extent to which schools in your district (generally speaking, across a majority of schools) use student assessment data for each of these purposes." (See Figure 8.6.) The top three reasons cited were:

- "To diagnose areas where students are in need of instructional support" (83.5 percent rated schools' use of data as "moderate" or "great");
- "To identify areas for school improvement" (81.8 percent); and
- "To identify which students do not meet grade level standards" (78 percent).

Figure 8.6

District Reporting of Reasons Their Schools Collect and Analyze Student Assessment Data
(N = 127)

	Schools do not use data for this purpose at all	Schools use data for this purpose to small extent	Schools use data for this purpose to moderate extent	Schools use data for this purpose to great extent
a. To diagnose areas where students are in need of instructional support.	1.6	15.0	40.2	43.3
b. For placement of students (e.g., into certain courses, support services, or educational programs)	6.3	17.5	42.1	34.1
c. For evaluation of individual students (e.g., for promotion to the next grade level or for graduation)	7.1	25.4	42.1	25.4
d. To identify which students do not meet grade level standards	5.5	16.5	32.3	45.7
e. To guide curriculum and instruction on an ongoing basis	3.2	24.8	43.2	28.8
f. To identify areas for school improvement	2.4	15.9	41.3	40.5
g. To better target school resources	9.5	29.4	36.5	24.6
h. To gauge the performance of student subgroups within the school.	6.5	26.8	41.5	25.2
i. To identify teachers who need assistance	47.2	31.2	18.4	3.2
j. To For evaluation of individual teachers	78.2	12.9	7.3	1.6

Interestingly, only 28.8 percent of districts said that schools use student assessment data "to guide curriculum and instruction on an ongoing basis" to a "great extent." However, 43.2 percent did say that schools use data for this purpose to a "moderate extent." Written survey comments also suggested that data are used by schools. In response to a general, open-ended question about accountability, several districts made comments about the use of data in guiding curriculum and instruction:

> *Most staff are in tune with accountability and are beginning to use data to drive instructional decisions.*
>
> *The accountability system has increased site level analysis of student performance as related to students' instructional needs.*
>
> *Policies and practices are more clearly focused and data is more effectively being used to guide decision making and instruction.*

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Assessments are used to make instructional decisions in the classroom and are used as a basis for intervention programs and staff development.

Some interviews also addressed district efforts to help schools use data to inform and improve classroom instruction. As one district administrator commented:

> *[Using data] is really helping schools to understand, so what is it about reading [for example] kids don't do well, and which kids is it that aren't doing it well? It's getting into identifying within a content area, and then also, is it all students, is it some students? If it's only some, which students is it? So that we can then match the kids up to the instructional changes.*

This same person, however, pointed out that where the improvement of instruction is concerned, an understanding of how to use and interpret data will be meaningless if it is not accompanied by an understanding of what to do differently in the classroom to address shortcomings indicated by the data:

> *The piece that is the biggest chasm that we haven't bridged yet is, once they begin to learn what the data tell them, how do they figure out what to do, making the connection to instruction? "Okay, I've learned that it's this about reading my kids don't do well, what do I do?" And that's where the...professional development from the instructional side has to come in — expand teachers' total box of strategies to know what to do other than more of the same of what [they've] already been doing....The instructional piece has to match the assessment and data piece.*

In other words, professional development on the use of data is not enough; professional development on improving instruction is also critical.

Survey respondents reported that schools, like districts, tend not to use student data in making decisions about teachers. 47.2 percent of respondents reported that schools in their districts do not use student assessment data "to identify teachers who need assistance" *at all*, and 78.2 percent of districts stated that schools do not use this data "for evaluation of individual teachers" *at all*. The latter is not surprising, however, given that some bargaining agreements prohibit the use of student assessment data in the evaluation of teachers. One district administrator, for example, commented in an interview that the district is "not allowed" to use data for evaluation purposes.[2]

[2] As documented by Bradley (1999), California is far from alone among states in avoiding the use of student achievement data in the evaluation of teachers. Apparently, this is an issue that other states, too, have found tricky; only a few states come even close to linking teacher evaluations with student performance. In Tennessee, principals may use student test results to recommend professional development for teachers, but not to evaluate them; the system is meant as a positive, diagnostic tool rather than as a punitive instrument. In Texas, a system that began in 1997–98 requires that districts evaluate teachers partly based on the student performance at the teachers' schools as a whole — but not in their individual classrooms. In Colorado, student performance is part of teacher evaluations as defined by local districts. Finally, Minnesota offers monetary rewards to Advanced Placement (AP) teachers for students who score well on AP exams.

- **Principals who were interviewed indicated that a substantial amount of data analysis takes place at the school level.**

Based on the interviews conducted with principals, school-level use of student assessment data appeared strong (perhaps surprisingly so) in almost every district visited. This is all the more impressive in that the interview protocol did not contain an explicit question about use of data; rather, principals discussed use of data in the context of other questions. The use of data is, likely, a further reflection of the power exerted by the SAT-9 and other assessments. (See Chapter 7.)

Nevertheless, school-level use and analysis of data was still somewhat variable across districts and across schools within a district. Some districts did seem to stand out as models of data analysis and use.

In one district, three out of four principals interviewed discussed use of data at considerable length, including such details as how the data are disaggregated and how principals are supported in using the data. All three principals said that they receive assessment data from the district; these data are reported by classroom as well as for the school as a whole and are disaggregated by a number of factors. One of the principals reported that the district superintendent had specifically told schools to address the performance of minority students, so she looks particularly at these data. She also said that she sits down with each teacher individually and goes over class scores, looking at the current status and thinking about how to make improvements. Another principal, similarly, stated that teachers look at their class data to determine their students' strengths and weaknesses, and they also evaluate their previous year's class to find clues to what they need to "beef up." The third principal mentioned that he had used test data to engineer curriculum changes within the school.

Principals in other districts as well discussed the ways their schools use data. For example, a principal in one district stated that disaggregating data helps to identify who is making gains; a principal at a different school in this district stressed the importance of reviewing results of the SAT-9 and using analysis for planning. He mentioned that he had taught school staff how to create Excel graphs of student performance results, and he reported that the staff learned a great deal by working with their own data and creating their own visual records of where students excel and where they need much work. A teacher at this school confirmed that school staff members spend a great deal of time looking at scores from the SAT-9 and from another assessment used in the district.

In a third district, three principals were interviewed, and all of them mentioned use of data. An elementary principal discussed how the school had looked at the test score data, identified areas needing improvement, and set goals for improvement in these areas. Although she said that these goals were ambitious and might not be attainable in one year, at least the scores should not go *down* in these areas. A middle school principal in this

district talked about how use of data had been limited in the past but was beginning to improve:

> *Even though through observations I have an opinion about which teachers do the best job, I really have never had any data that would show me whether or not they're really consistently getting better results…We were never able to get data by teacher until this year. We're supposed to get the scores that come in in June by this year's teacher, and then by next year's teacher, so that next year's teachers can use that for their analysis of their kids and what they do, and this year's teachers can take a look at how effective their [practice] is.*

The third principal in this district, also of a middle school, reported that schools in the district had "spent an afternoon" analyzing last year's SAT-9 scores. A teacher in this school indicated that the math department had used test score data to focus instruction. Every year, she said, "We have a goal that we want to meet for the kids; we want to raise their percentile in [a] particular area." This year, their goal was to raise achievement in fractions and decimals.

Principals in each of the other five districts visited mentioned some use of data as well. (See box.) However, except in the few examples presented above, principals' reports of teachers working with data were seldom corroborated in interviews with the teachers themselves. Indeed, teachers rarely mentioned using data at all. Although many did say that they use test scores as an indicator to gauge their effectiveness, most of them were referring to their own classroom assessments, rather than to the SAT-9 or district assessments. One principal even acknowledged outright that teachers do not trust or use the data and feel that low scores are not their responsibility. And an administrator in a different district said that although the teachers in the district do look at their classroom data, his experience has been that when their results are not good, they blame the measurement techniques.

Cross-District Snapshot: School Use of Data

The following remarks about the use of data were made by administrators (four principals and one assistant principal) in five different districts:

> *Results from the SAT-9 are shared with teachers. In departments, teachers take school results and identify weaknesses and strengths, then create an action plan to help students improve.*

> *We break down the results of the SAT-9 for the strengths and weaknesses of our students and use that to come up with curriculum to stress the following year. We try to develop their weaknesses into strengths… I meet with each [teacher] and go over test scores and come up with what their teaching strengths are, what areas their students did well in, and what were weaknesses.*

(continues)

Cross-District Snapshot — continued

I would like to do what we did for writing and continue it with math — data collection, disaggregating data, data analysis — even if it is not a PQR year. We disaggregated writing data according to gender, ethnicity, LEP, etc. It was very informative.

The teachers did a lot of grade-level work analyzing the scores on the standardized tests to determine the student weaknesses. Then the following year they focused on those areas. It had a profound effect on the way the kids did.

We have spent the year doing a thorough analysis of our achievement data....We are committed to using achievement data to drive instructional and budgetary decisions.

In the Next Chapter

As we have seen in this chapter, using student assessment data generated by the accountability system presents significant problems: expertise is lacking, particularly at the school and classroom levels, and even districts were limited in their use of data to drive the accountability system. One factor that can positively influence the use of data is the presence of consequences and incentives, tied to student achievement, as part of an accountability system. This topic is taken up in the next chapter.

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Chapter 9

Consequences and Incentives

Highlights of Findings

- **Most districts established performance targets for schools, but their use and approach varied considerably by district.**
  Prior to the passage of the PSAA, districts were largely free to establish their own performance targets. Because Title I schools were required to do so, most did: 61.1 percent of district survey respondents reported having Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals for Title I schools. The numbers of non-Title I schools with targets were, unsurprisingly, lower.

- **Only a few districts offered rewards for good performance, and most districts were only at the beginning stages of thinking through consequences for low performance.**
  Only 5.3 percent of districts said that they offered some form of incentives for high student performance or for improving performance. Among the few districts that were considering the use of consequences for low performance, there were different perspectives about their scope and implementation. Districts were more likely to report using some form of supportive intervention (e.g., assign experts to develop improvement plans) than they were to report implementing sanctions. In fact, only 1 respondent out of 127 indicated school reconstitution as an important district policy for schools with low performance.

- **Principals are more likely than teachers to be held accountable for performance at the school level.**
  State policymaker and district interviews both pointed to the principal as the primary person at the school level whose job was on the line for student performance. Holding teachers accountable was viewed as legally problematic or too complicated. Teachers interviewed were also unclear about whether they were subject to any consequences for low student performance. Students are being held increasingly accountable through policies against social promotion. Parents can be held accountable for student attendance but not for student achievement. If schools, teachers, and students are going to be held accountable, both districts and policymakers agree that they most be provided with certain levels of support.

(continues)

Highlights of Findings — continued

- **When given the opportunity, districts raised many concerns about the state's new Academic Performance Index ranking system.**
  Some districts believe rankings will be counterproductive, leading to lower teacher morale and an overreliance on STAR testing. They also believe that only schools with similar student populations should be compared. There was an overall concern that rankings and subsequent sanctions may exacerbate already-difficult conditions for the lowest performing schools, which also have the highest minority and low-SES populations. Finally, districts are concerned that the 5 percent growth rate per year is unrealistic and unfair.

By some definitions, the very heart of an educational accountability system is *consequences* (frequently referred to as "teeth"). Indeed, the very notion of educational "accountability" implies that someone, somewhere is being held accountable, or responsible, for student achievement and will face consequences if achievement does not rise. Thus, any discussion of accountability is incomplete if it does not include some mention of (a) performance targets for schools, the specific goals that are set for increased achievement, and (b) the consequences for reaching — or not reaching — these performance targets. This chapter discusses the types of performance targets that districts set (if any) and the consequences and incentives districts provide to encourage schools to reach targets.

For the purposes of this study, the overarching research questions on the topic of consequences and incentives were:

> ***What types of performance targets do districts set for schools?***
>
> ***What types of incentives do districts provide for schools to meet their targets? What consequences do schools face if they do not meet the targets?***

Performance Targets

- **Performance targets can take several forms. State policymakers believe the focus should be on student achievement and its growth over time.**

Performance targets can be of numerous types. For example, performance targets can depend on a single measure (e.g., standardized test scores), or they can be composed of a

combination of multiple measures or indicators. The measures need not necessarily all be directly related to student achievement: measures such as attendance rates, graduation or drop-out rates, or LEP redesignation rates can also be included. State policymakers who were interviewed, however, concurred with one another that student achievement should be the primary focus, and they suggested that indicators of student achievement should include multiple measures of academic performance that are directly related to standards.

Performance targets can differ in other ways as well. For instance, all schools in a district can have the same target, or schools may have different targets depending on their baseline performance; targets can also be set for particular student subgroups within schools or within districts. In addition, targets can be an absolute standard of achievement, a goal for growth over time, or both (e.g., amount of growth needed each year to reach an absolute target in five years). State policymakers expressed the view that the main focus should be on growth ("value added" or change in scores), though they said that absolute scores also are important.

- **Under the Standards-Based Accountability System, districts were largely free to set their own performance targets, especially for non-Title I schools. A majority of districts did set targets, but a considerable minority did not.**

Prior to the passage of the Public Schools Accountability Act (1999), districts were largely free to set their own performance targets. Although the Standards-Based Accountability System instituted detailed student achievement reporting requirements for districts, the state was largely silent on the question of the level of student achievement to which schools should aspire in any given year. The exception was Title I schools, which, in order to meet federal IASA Title I requirements, were required to have some type of target or minimum level of achievement. For 1996–97 and 1997–98, this target was 40 percent of students meeting or exceeding grade-level standards in reading/language arts and mathematics. Districts were to identify Title I schools for Program Improvement if they did not meet this goal. (See Consolidated Application, p. 35, in Appendix.)

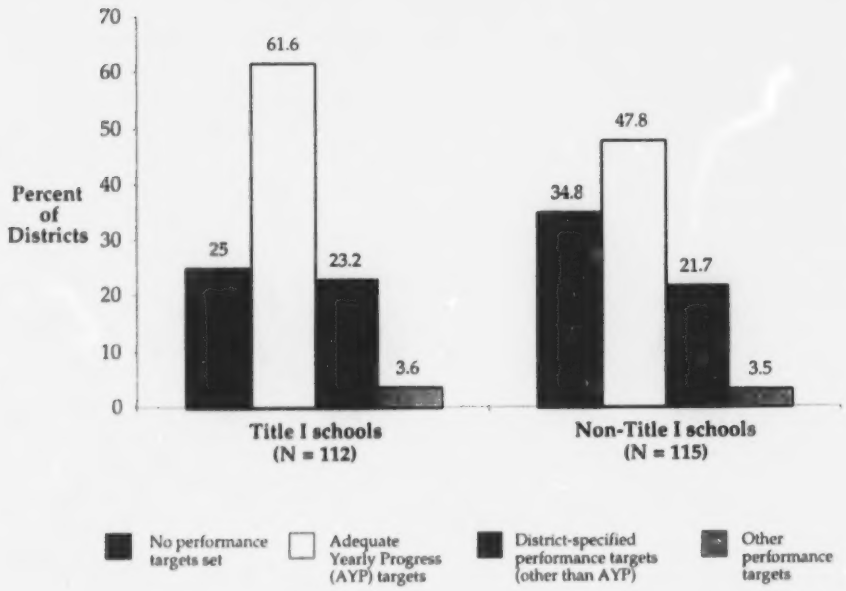
Moreover, the state set a general goal of at least 90 percent of students meeting or exceeding grade-level standards by the 2006–2007 school year. Schools identified for Program Improvement were required to remain in Program Improvement until they demonstrated "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) toward this 90 percent goal for two of three consecutive years. Most state documents on the topic, however, did not define "adequate yearly progress." They also did not discuss interim performance targets for *non*-Title I schools.

Nevertheless, district survey responses indicated that the majority of districts did set some type of performance targets for their schools, as Figure 9.1 shows. For Title I schools, 61.6 percent of respondents said districts set AYP targets, and 23.2 percent of respondents reported other district-specified performance targets. For non-Title I schools, unsurprisingly

(given the lack of official requirements), the numbers were somewhat smaller; 47.8 percent of respondents reported AYP targets, and 21.7 percent reported district-specified performance targets (other than AYP). However, one-quarter of respondents said that their districts set no performance targets even for their Title I schools, and over one third of respondents (34.8%) reported no performance targets for non-Title I schools. Without performance goals, the concept of accountability has little meaning, as there is nothing to be held accountable *for*.

Figure 9.1

District Reporting of Performance Targets for Schools



- **The types of performance targets set by districts are highly variable.**

As for the types of performance targets in use, 43.4 percent of district survey respondents checked "targets rise over time"; 38.5 percent checked "targets set for more than one measure or for a combination of measures (e.g., an index)."[1] In addition, 29.5 percent of

[1] On a different survey item, only 28.6 percent of respondents (36 of 126) reported that their district uses "an index or formula to rate the performance of schools in the district." However, 97 districts then went on to answer the follow-up question, "If yes, what measures are part of this index?" This indicates some confusion over the use of the term "index." As "standardized test scores," "report card grades," and "other student academic performance measures" were the items most frequently checked in the follow-up question, it seems likely that

respondents indicated "targets set for student subgroups (as well as for schools)," and 28.7 indicated "targets tailored to individual schools."

District interviews yielded greater information about the types of performance targets some districts designate. Information from four districts, current as of when the interviews were conducted in the spring of 1999, is detailed here.

District A

In this small district, the state's goal of 90 percent of students performing at grade level in 10 years became the district's long-range goal. The district then calculated that meeting this long-range goal would necessitate an improvement of 8 percent per year in test scores. To try to make this level of improvement a reality, the district set up a system of standing committees for strategic planning, responsible for developing curriculum, assessment tools, and innovative programs. If the target is not met in any given year, the amount of improvement required the next year is increased.

District B

In District B, each school is given a data sheet containing its performance standards. With help from the district office, each school develops an individual school plan to help them focus on areas where they need improvement. Each school has individual annual performance targets, and there is an absolute standard of 90 percent mastery. To help schools, school plans are developed with goals and objectives laid out; district staff are assigned to help particular schools, and professional development is offered.

District C

Like District B, District C judged that it was important to develop reasonable, achievable goals tailored to individual school sites. They reasoned that, if they required the same achievement benchmarks for all schools, the ones close to the benchmarks would feel complacent and thus would not make changes, while the ones at the bottom would feel incapable of reaching the goals and also would not implement changes.

The district therefore requires each school to do a needs assessment based on a review of data and then to set three to five goals, at least one of which is related to academic achievement. The goals have to be measurable, and the schools also must develop an instructional plan for how to meet them. Ideally, the goals and the plan are developed collaboratively by the principal, teachers, and site council rather than by the principal in isolation, but this varies by site. Part of the idea behind the goals plan is to have all of the requirements a school faces (local, state, and federal) combined into one plan, so that the school doesn't feel like it has to juggle multiple (and possibly conflicting) requirements.

---

many districts interpreted this item as being about what multiple measures their districts were employing to gauge *student* mastery of standards, not school performance.

The goals and plan are reviewed by the principal's supervisor, who must agree with them. Schools are given a three-year timeline for improvement, although progress is monitored each year. There are three ways to be successful in this system. One is to set goals and meet them. A second is to set goals, fully implement the methods agreed to and approved by management, but not reach the goals. (If the supervisor has agreed to the goals and methods, and agrees that there was full implementation, then the school is not considered responsible for failure and a different approach is tried.) A third way is if environmental factors out of the school's control interfere with the methods or make the initial goals unrealistic (such as a major change in a school's population).

At the time of the interviews with District C staff, the program was in its first year, and staff indicated that it was not yet clear how well it would work. The district was planning to look at how the schools did on the 1999 SAT-9 with regard to meeting their goals. (The SAT-9 scores had not yet been released when the interviews were conducted.) In future years, they plan to expand the range of measures they look at in evaluating the schools.

District D

District D designed an elaborate system of performance goals based on multiple indicators including standardized test scores, portfolio assessments, report card grades (soon to be standards-based), English language learner redesignation rates, and advanced course completion. The results for measures (e.g., subtests) within each indicator are designated as "above target," "meets target," or "below target," and are assigned numerical values accordingly. These values are then averaged to create a general rating for the indicator; for example, schools that have a high mean rating for any given indicator are considered to be "exemplary in meeting targets for the indicator." Finally, these ratings are used to determine performance for each school as a whole and for student subgroups. For instance, schools or subgroups that are "exemplary" on a majority of indicators and "successful" on the others are considered to have been "exemplary in meeting schoolwide/subgroup targets."

In addition, long-range district-wide goals are set for each indicator (10 years for some, 6 years for others). Interim (two-year) targets are then calculated for each school and subgroup by (a) determining the gap between the district goal and the school's or subgroup's baseline data and (b) calculating how much improvement will be needed every two years in order to reach the long-term goals.

The district is still in the early stages of implementing this system. In 1998, schools received their baseline data and set their targets. In the summer of 1999, schools were scheduled to receive "midpoint" data, showing how they were progressing toward their first two-year targets. Next year, in 2000, the plan was to look at whether schools met their targets. However, changes in state accountability (with the passage of the PSAA), as well as changes

within the district, cast some doubt on the future continuation of the system as designed. Nevertheless, district administrators who were interviewed did mention that this system was developed collaboratively by many stakeholders and had a high degree of buy-in, and thus that there was much reluctance to discard it or even to change it.

Incentives for Meeting Targets and Consequences for Not Meeting Them

> *If we really believe we are a profession that can deliver the goods on student achievement, then we should be willing to accept rewards for success and consequences for failure. We should adopt a no-excuses philosophy. That will be difficult for a profession that has survived on excuses. We must be willing to accept responsibility regardless of the background of our students.*
>
> *—District Administrator*

Once performance targets are set, the question arises as to whether there will be any rewards for meeting or exceeding them and any consequences for failing to meet them. If so, what will the nature of these rewards or consequences be? Will consequences be supportive interventions to raise achievement or punitive actions to penalize insufficient or unsuccessful efforts? And who is the appropriate audience for the rewards and consequences? The district? Schools as a whole? Individual principals? Teachers? Students? This section and the following section discuss some of the ways that state policymakers and districts have addressed these questions.

- **Only a few districts offer rewards to schools for high or improved student performance.**

On the matter of incentives, state policymakers who were interviewed were not particularly sanguine about the power of rewards (although the Legislature added significantly to rewards after interviews were completed). At the district level, only 7 out of 131 survey respondents (5.3%) said that their districts offer incentives or rewards to individual schools for high student performance or for improving performance.

Similarly, district interviews found little evidence that most districts were currently including incentives in their accountability plans, although a few districts were thinking about or planning the development of incentives systems. How these nascent rewards systems will be affected by the PSAA is an interesting question for further research.

In one district that was visited, none of the administrators who were interviewed discussed incentives for schools, but the district's survey response and its accountability literature suggest that the district does, in fact, offer rewards to schools that have been "exemplary" or "successful" in meeting their targets. These rewards take such forms as money (raised by the district through contributions), recognition, and increased autonomy for the schools.

- **Administrators, principals, and teachers did not seem to have a common understanding of the consequences for low student performance — even within the same district.**

The matter of consequences appears somewhat more complex. This complexity may stem, at least in part, from different people envisioning different things when they hear the word "consequences." For example, some conjure up dire images of reconstitution and other punitive measures, whereas others may think of intervention strategies as being a type of consequence. As such, interviews yielded conflicting information over the extent to which districts have instituted consequences and the nature of these consequences.

In particular, district and school site visits revealed a lack of common understanding about the consequences of success or failure among teachers, principals, and even among district administrators. In one district, for example, two district administrators separately reported a different series of consequences that would likely occur if schools failed to meet their goals.

In another district, a district administrator reported that there were currently no consequences for not meeting targets, although she said that the district is planning to devise a system of interventions for low-performing schools. Principals in this district, however, believed that there were already consequences in place, although they had different perceptions about what these consequences entailed. One principal was not sure what the response would be to dropping scores, but she suspected that it would lead to "unwanted scrutiny from the district office." She did not, however, think that the district would fire her or teachers. Another principal in the same district, on the other hand, thought she probably *would* be removed from her position if scores at her school did not rise.

In yet another district, a teacher suggested that the district was planning to implement a "big accountability program" in which "teachers' jobs will be tied to student performance on the standardized test." The principal at this teacher's school, however, did not mention this; in fact, the principal stated that *he* would be the one held responsible if performance was not satisfactory. Interviews with district officials and reviews of district accountability documents also did not suggest that teachers would lose their jobs as a result of low student performance. Another teacher in the district had this to say about consequences:

If a school doesn't meet the standards there will be assistance. The district will come on-site to train teachers in order to improve student performance. If it still doesn't improve there will be changes imposed (administration, teaching assignments, closing of the site).

- **Districts that were instituting consequences for low performance were still in the very early stages of doing so.**

At least part of the confusion may have been due to the fact that the implementation of consequences was still a very new thing or, in some cases, had not yet even officially begun. In all of these districts, the design stage (for consequences) was still underway at the time of the interviews, so the differing perceptions were not surprising. These cases do, however, highlight the need for explicitly stated, well-publicized, consistently applied consequences.

In another district that was still in the early stages of designing and implementing consequences, the adopted system proposes progressive consequences for schools with persistently low achievement; these consequences begin with intensive assistance and progress to reconstitution. District administrators who were interviewed, however, suggested that it was too soon to determine whether the district was committed to following through with the full range of proposed interventions.

In yet another district, administrators who were interviewed said that there were no formal or "direct" consequences for failure to meet the district's annual improvement target, but, last year when the goal was not met, some changes were instituted. For one thing, schools scrambled to get the curriculum and assessments in line. District innovations also were implemented in response. These included intense tutoring programs, a twilight school (in which parents and children come together to an evening program so that children can see that adults continue to learn), and use of special education teachers as resource consultants to classroom teachers. In addition, the district invested heavily in technology and also instituted a training program to have 90 percent of teachers certified to teach LEP students.

Who Should Be Held Accountable and How?

We need to discuss what accountability really means. People do not lose jobs. Scores do get published. Accountability comes at the end, when students leave and go out into the world and the community. Not much impact in terms of teachers being fired and replaced. State or district — little to none.

—Principal

The complexity surrounding consequences can also be attributed to confusion or lack of agreement about the appropriate target of consequences. Even at the state level, although all policymakers who were interviewed agreed that an accountability system without consequences is "an empty shell," they held differing views on who should be accountable.[2] Some, for example, emphasized holding districts accountable for the performance of their schools, while others wanted to hold schools — and principals, in particular — responsible for the performance of their students. Still others viewed accountability as a way of ultimately holding teachers accountable for the performance of their students, and several also discussed holding students and parents accountable. Further discussion of each of these groups follows.

- **Based on district interviews, many districts appear to hold the superintendent accountable at least to some degree.**

Districts and Superintendents. Among state policymakers who viewed the district as the center of the accountability mechanism, districts were seen as directly responsible for the score of each and every school in their jurisdictions. Consequently, the ultimate sanction is to remove schools from their jurisdiction.

District administrators who were interviewed did not discuss the removal of schools from district jurisdiction as a possible consequence for low performance, but several did mention formal or informal consequences for district superintendents and their staff. Here are examples from five districts:

> *District A:* The district superintendent holds himself personally responsible; consequences could entail replacement.
>
> *District B:* Goals are written into the annual evaluation of the superintendent, and at the end of the year he submits a progress report to the School Board. District staff are similarly evaluated against agreed-upon goals. Consequences: the superintendent's contract might not be renewed.
>
> *District C:* The superintendent is held accountable for district effectiveness, measured by School Board perception, newspaper coverage, and parent complaints.
>
> *District D:* The superintendent is accountable to the School Board for meeting objectives jointly developed with the Board. Consequences include loss of job.

[2] These interviews were conducted in early 1999, prior to the passage of the PSAA.

District E: The superintendent's annual evaluation is tied to school performance. This filters down to the people supervised by the superintendent.

- **Although state policymakers stressed sanctions such as negative publicity and reconstitution for low-performing schools, districts were more likely to focus on supportive interventions.**

Schools. Several state policymakers suggested that the school should be the center of the accountability mechanism. Among these individuals, there was wide agreement that consequences should vary based on the severity of the problem and the lack of progress in meeting goals. Appropriate sanctions, according to policymakers, range from negative publicity to the "death penalty," i.e., reconstitution.

Reconstitution, however, was seldom mentioned by district administrators, either in interviews or on the survey. One district administrator who was interviewed did mention that the district could take over a site's budgeting as an interim intervention, and that schools could face intervention teams, fiscal audits, budget control, or reconstitution. On the survey, only 1 respondent out of 127 checked "District reconstitutes schools (particularly if schools do not improve over time)" as one of the three most important policies or intervention strategies employed by the district with schools that demonstrate low academic performance. More frequent responses were:

- "Schools are assisted by district-appointed experts in formulating an improvement plan and goals." (48.8 percent of respondents)
- "District tailors interventions to particular schools." (38.6 percent of respondents)
- "Schools receive additional professional development opportunities." (35.4 percent of respondents)
- "Schools consult with school community (e.g., teachers, parents, students)." (33.1 percent of respondents.)

It would appear, then, that most districts' consequences for schools are not punitive in nature but rather are aimed at providing schools with support to improve student performance.

- **Districts are starting to hold principals accountable for student performance, although in many cases, this accountability remains somewhat informal or even hypothetical.**

Principals. State policymakers who were interviewed said that sanctions for principals should range from publicity to loss of job. Some expressed concern that accountability may

be setting up principals as scapegoats for failure. Most agreed that additional rewards are needed to encourage productive principals to remain in their posts.

District administrators who were interviewed suggested that districts are just starting to hold principals accountable for school performance. As demonstrated by the following examples, nearly every district said that principals could, in theory, be removed from their positions for accountability reasons *per se*, but none actually had been removed as of the time of the interviews:

> *District A:* Principals have goals and objectives set out in their individual school plans and could be moved or replaced, although this has not yet happened.
>
> *District B:* Principals are accountable to the assistant superintendent of their division for meeting their school goals. The consequences of not meeting goals are still to be seen, according to one administrator who was interviewed. There is a three-year timeline for improvement, after which a principal would be transferred back to teaching if the goals are not met.
>
> *District C:* Principals are accountable for ensuring that the district-adopted curriculum and standards are in place and taught in all classrooms. (It seemed, however, that this was mostly reviewed in an informal way.) Principals can be terminated, and one recently was, though not only for accountability reasons.
>
> *District D:* Principals are accountable to grade level directors. Chronic underperformance could end in demotion of the principal.
>
> *District E:* "There's a great deal of principal accountability," reported one administrator in this district. "Basically, it's the principal's head on the line," she continued, although she also said that this is not a "formalized" system. Another administrator interviewed in this district also mentioned "high stakes" and "personal accountability" for principals, based on their personnel evaluations. However, it appeared that principals in this district were not being held accountable for student *achievement*, but rather for how effectively their schools were moving toward implementation of certain types of instructional *practices*. No principals had yet lost their jobs at the time of the interviews, but it was anticipated that some probably would in the summer of 1999.

At the school level, some principals who were interviewed indicated that they felt that they were being held accountable for school performance. For many, this seemed to be a general impression of an informal process, rather than concrete knowledge of an official district policy. A few, though, did mention formal processes for holding principals accountable.

One principal, for example, said that starting with the 1999–2000 school year, the extent to which schools meet projections of achievement in different areas — "everything from attendance to achievement in math and language arts to our redesignation rates of our ESL kids" — will be part of principals' official evaluations. This principal, who was not from any of the five districts mentioned above, admitted to having somewhat mixed reactions about the new policy. "It's kind of interesting," she said, "I'm excited about looking at what the results are going to be, and I'm a little bit fearful at the same time."

- **For most districts, holding teachers accountable for student performance is legally problematic or otherwise murky.**

Teachers. Among state policymakers who were interviewed, teachers were widely seen as the most important component in a successful accountability system. Holding teachers formally accountable, however, appeared at least somewhat problematic from the point of view of most district administrators who were interviewed, largely for legal reasons.

For example, in one district, when the administrator being interviewed was asked about teacher accountability, he replied, "They have tenure." Similarly, in another district, an administrator who was interviewed said that the district's ability to use student performance in the evaluation of teachers is mostly precluded by law. Both of these administrators indicated that, as a result of these restrictions, teachers are not held responsible for the achievement of their students. However, one of them did go on to mention that persistent low achievement of students could lead to unsatisfactory employee appraisal ratings which over time could lead to discipline. The other administrator said that teachers are responsible for implementing the curriculum, although he did not know if there were any consequences for failing to do so.

In two other districts where district interviews occurred, administrators indicated that teachers are held accountable on an informal basis. In one of these districts, principals are held accountable, and a district official suggested that principal accountability filtered down to teacher accountability; when principals are accountable, she postulated, they will hold their teachers accountable. In the other district, administrators mentioned that principals are not "individually accountable"; there are consequences for school sites, but not for teachers specifically. However, teachers are accountable in a more informal sense, both "above to their principals" and "below to their students and parents," to help attain school goals. In some district schools, one administrators reported, principals require teachers to set classroom goals.

In only one district did there appear to be well-defined accountability for teachers. One administrator in this district said that teacher evaluations are tied to standards, with classroom scores being compared across teachers. In theory, consequences could include dismissal, but this has not yet happened.

Among teachers who were interviewed, as discussed above, there were differing perceptions, even within districts, about the extent to which they would be held accountable. Several teachers admitted that they were uncertain about the extent to which they themselves, as teachers, were or would be held accountable for student performance. One teacher, when asked if there were "consequences" if students did not show mastery of standards, replied, "Well, I want to say yes, but I don't know. I mean, I haven't heard what they are." Another teacher, when discussing accountability with regard to the SAT-9, stated, "I'm not very clear about how much I'm held accountable for that....I don't know how much *I'm* held accountable for the SAT-9 scores."

Some teachers suggested that in fact, there were no consequences tied to accountability. Both of the following remarks were made by teachers in one district about accountability in general:

> *Nothing is being done....There's a greater awareness of what the [test] scores mean, but as far as accountability at a personal level, I don't think there is any.*

> *I think the accountability system is weak, talk is cheap, I really don't know what the district's accountability system is....I don't see any accountability — it just sounds like there is.*

Other teachers in this district, however, suggested that they did feel that they would personally be held accountable. One teacher, for example, stated, " They put the blame on teachers. If someone scores poorly, it's the teacher's fault. So you be as thorough as you can." Yet another teacher in this district said that she wasn't aware of the district's accountability structure at all.

- **Students are being held increasingly accountable for their performance, as policies designed to end social promotion gain force and summer school programs become more common.**

Students. Many state policymakers who were interviewed suggested that unless there are consequences for students, little can be expected in terms of performance on tests. Ending social promotion, as legislated in 1998, was seen as a powerful incentive for students.

Somewhat surprisingly, only a few district administrators who were interviewed discussed the state's social promotion legislation when talking about consequences for students. Others reported consequences for students that were similar to those contained in the legislation, but not in the context of the legislation. For example, administrators in one district said that students are accountable for meeting grade level standards. Possible consequences students face include summer programs, retention, transition programs

before high school, and no work permits granted. One administrator in this district, however, said that it was not yet clear how consistently these consequences would be applied. Another administrator reported that the district could end up retaining almost 50 percent of the district's students for not meeting standards.

Other districts' student accountability policies included the following:

> *District A:* Students must meet proficiency requirements in math, reading, and writing in order to graduate. There may soon be promotion requirements from middle school to high school, and summer school programs have become "more intense."
>
> *District B:* Students are accountable for meeting teachers' expectations for academic and behavioral performance. Consequences could include retention and discipline (ranging from suspension to expulsion).
>
> *District C:* There are no student consequences yet. The district does, however, plan to determine a method for ending social promotion based on standards-based report cards. In addition, the district is just beginning to use scores to identify students in need of summer remediation or retention.

- **Parents can be held legally accountable for student attendance but not for student achievement. Districts are experimenting with ways to increase parental involvement.**

Parents. Although state policymakers concurred that parents are an important unit of accountability, there was little agreement about the effectiveness or appropriateness of consequences for parents. Parents were regarded as "the hardest group to get at," and, while ending social promotion may be a lever for increasing parental involvement, policymakers were doubtful about its effectiveness in doing so.

Similar sentiments were expressed by district administrators who were interviewed. According to an administrator in one district, for example, a district committee felt there needed to be parental accountability, but they did not know how to attain it. The district concluded that there were few legal avenues available for holding parents accountable. They do have leverage over parents on welfare, in that welfare benefits can be reduced or eliminated altogether for parents with truant students. Enforcing this policy resulted in an unexpected additional 1,600 children attending district schools in 1998–99. However, there did not seem to be any similar policies or sanctions related to low student achievement. Moreover, since not all parents receive welfare benefits, the equity of such policies is somewhat suspect.

An almost identical policy was reported by officials in a different district. They said that parents are not directly accountable except for compliance with attendance laws. Parents of students who are chronically absent are subject to legal action, but there are no consequences for parents of students who fail academically.

In a third district, a district administrator mentioned that the district has a parent involvement office that helps schools design information and training for parents. Also, home-school compacts encourage parent participation. But, said this administrator, "there's a limit to what you can do" where parents are concerned. She felt that the district accountability system tried to set a tone of valuing parent participation and accountability. At the same time, though, she warned against using parents as an excuse for low achievement.

- **If schools, teachers, and students are going to be held accountable for reaching certain goals, they must be provided with the levels of support necessary to achieve those goals.**

Many discussions about accountability discuss the consequences that people will face if they do not achieve the goals that have been set. All too often, however, such discussions make little or no mention of what types of support and resources will be necessary to reach those goals. This issue came up in several interviews (both state and district) with respect to almost all of the different groups discussed above.

For example, some state policymakers who voiced a desire to hold schools accountable expressed concern that schools do not have sufficient control over resources to be held accountable appropriately. Several policymakers expressed agreement with the principle that schools should be allowed greater flexibility and freedom than currently exists from the constraints of federal, state, and even district policies. This sentiment was echoed by an administrator in one district where the accountability system puts principals' jobs "on the line." "Your head's on the line," she said, referring to principals, "but as a district we have to provide you with the support and the authority you need to do what we're asking the principal to do."

Moreover, some policymakers emphasized that the degree of support, including financial support, that schools receive from districts varies considerably. Even when schools are the focus of the accountability system, these policymakers suggested, districts must at least be held accountable for providing equal opportunity to learn to all students. Some felt that not enough attention is currently being given to this.

At the other end of the spectrum, several people who were interviewed discussed the need to provide support for *students*, particularly if students are going to be held accountable through social promotion policies. Some policymakers, for instance, were concerned that,

unless there is a strong commitment to intervention strategies, ending social promotion will not serve its intended purpose of improving student achievement.

Similarly, at the district level, one administrator commented, "The notion that we're going to punish kids, and hold them over, when they haven't had access to quality instruction, isn't right." She then mentioned that a district committee has been looking at ways to set up support systems for kids; last year they had an after-school reading program for grades 3 and 8 to support students who were not being successful. Another administrator in this same district also mentioned that students would not be held accountable for failing to meet achievement criteria if their school never offered the necessary support.

Rewards and Consequences in the Public Schools Accountability Act

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999 (PSAA) introduced a statewide system of interventions and incentives for schools. All schools in the state are to be ranked based on the Academic Performance Index (API). Growth targets are then set using the 1999 value of the API as a baseline; for most schools, these targets are to be at least 5 percent growth annually.

Depending on where schools fall in the API ranking and on how their achievement changes from year to year, they may receive rewards or face interventions and sanctions. In the High Achieving/Improving Schools Program, monetary and non-monetary rewards (such as waivers) are to be given to schools showing high achievement or meeting or exceeding growth targets as measured by the API.

For low-performing schools, the PSAA created the Immediate Intervention/ Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP). In the first year of the program, 430 low-performing schools (as indicated by 1998 and 1999 STAR results) volunteered to take part in this program. In subsequent years, schools that fail to meet growth targets may volunteer or may be selected to participate in the II/USP, subject to funding.

In 1999–2000, 353 II/USP schools received planning grants of $50,000 each to develop school action plans. These schools must hire external evaluators to coordinate the plans' development. After the action plans are approved by local governing boards, reviewed by CDE, and approved by the State Board of Education, participating schools receive additional funding to implement the plans in the subsequent year. The implementation grants for these schools will be a minimum of $50,000 for each school, up to approximately $168 per pupil.

The other 77 II/USP schools in 1999–2000 are schools that have already completed the planning process and received federal grants of up to $200 per pupil to implement improvement activities over the next three years.

Participating schools that do not meet their targets within 12 months after implementation will be subject to local sanctions, such as the removal of the principal. Those that do not meet their targets within two years after implementation will be subject to state interventions such as takeover by the state Superintendent of Instruction.

Although the details of all of these programs were just starting to emerge at the time the surveys and interviews for this study were conducted, many people did comment on them. Reactions are summarized below.

- **Some districts oppose the idea of ranking schools. They think it will be counterproductive, particularly given the basis for the ranking.**

Many survey respondents expressed the view that ranking schools is of limited usefulness. One person wrote that "comparing schools seems counterproductive" but also acknowledged that "it is getting attention from educators." Other survey comments echoed the concern about ranking:

> *Rank ordering of "ok to bad" will further damage morale and hinder progress.*
>
> *Misleading to community members to see a "list" that might be misinterpreted to mean an absolute measure of quality; such comparisons in our small area will cause conflicts.*
>
> *I feel ranking schools is defeating the goal to improve.*
>
> *Ranking schools does not solve our problems with low-performing schools.*

A couple of respondents indicated that their primary objection to the ranking was its reliance (at least in the early years) on SAT-9 scores[3]:

> *I think there is limited value in ranking schools when I believe those rankings will ultimately and perhaps exclusively depend on SAT-9 scores.*
>
> *I am concerned with the state's intention to rank schools based on STAR testing.*

[3] See also Chapter 7, "Assessment Measures."

- **Many districts believe that the ranking should take into account schools' differing circumstances, particularly as related to socioeconomic status and language-minority populations.**

Many survey respondents did not object to ranking schools *per se* but felt that it was important to take schools' circumstances into account in the ranking and to compare only similar schools. Numerous survey respondents made remarks about this:

> *No problem being accountable — just don't compare schools of high and low SES and high and low LEP counts.*
>
> *Our lowest achieving schools are also our lowest socioeconomic. I hope bands for comparison of similar schools are developed.*
>
> *Schools that have low SES (socioeconomic status) should not be compared with high SES when evaluating test scores.*
>
> *Until the playing field is entirely even — funding (revenue limit vs. basic aid) I think the development of a performance index is not fair.*
>
> *As a result of this district being in a low-income, high-poverty area, in the short term the district will compare very poorly with other areas of the state.*
>
> *We are concerned that important factors (poverty, transiency, LEP numbers) will not be taken into account. We will be hoping that schools below 50th percentile (a terrible way to measure school success, by the way) are looked at for their growth.*

In school-level interviews, a few principals also suggested that schools' circumstances should be taken into account in discussions of accountability and achievement (not necessarily with specific regard to the PS AA). For example, one principal of a low-performing school objected to blame being placed on the school for problems she felt were beyond the school's control, and she resented the expectation that the school could "fix" the problems. She commented, "The pressure is on the teachers and the schools, regardless of the circumstances these students and families are facing" (e.g., poverty, low parent education levels, limited English proficiency). She also stated, "These political pressures serve to make these families and students feel inadequate."

- **Disproportionate impact on schools with large language-minority or low-SES populations is another area of concern for districts. Some indicated that sanctions may even exacerbate existing problems for low-performing schools by increasing instability.**

Another equity-related concern about the new legislation is about its effects on schools with low-SES or high-LEP populations. Several survey respondents expressed the view that these schools will be disproportionately affected by the PSAA:

> *One school (low SES) is affected more than other four (high SES).... LEP students disproportionately impacted.*

> *The issue is resource allocation. With over 1,000,000 ELL students and over 25% of students in poverty, new legislation will disproportionately impact minority and poor students. CA needs to at least reach nationwide average on per pupil expenditures.*

Some suggested that the impact of the PSAA on certain schools may not only be disproportionate, but could be *adverse*. In particular, some districts were extremely concerned that the sanctions for low-performing schools may actually *exacerbate* existing problems by causing staffing changes when what is most needed is stability:

> *I agree with the intent but the playing field is not level. We anticipate changes in administration at schools with high ELL populations due to schools not showing necessary growth. Thus, schools most needing stability will likely go through greatest change.*

> *I have grave concerns about sanctions for low-performing schools. Our lowest performing schools tend to have the highest poverty rate, youngest least-experienced staff, etc. Sanctions will encourage the dedicated experienced teachers to transfer to higher-performing (higher socioeconomic) schools.*

> *It [new legislation] will cause difficulties for low performing schools to keep effective teachers and administrators.*

A district administrator who was interviewed also said she was concerned about "state sanctions for low-performing schools that don't meet their target."

- **Some districts object to the rewards and sanctions that are part of the new accountability policy.**

Even apart from equity issues, a few survey respondents seemed to object to the inclusion of rewards and sanctions in the new system, as indicated by the following comments:

> *Sanctions and rewards should not be part of the picture.*

The one [piece of legislation] of most concern relates to Rewards and Sanctions.

The sanctions and rewards will not bring out the best in people. They will manipulate the system.

Other survey respondents did not necessarily object to rewards and sanctions *per se*, but indicated concerns about the particular *nature* of some of the rewards and sanctions specified in the new legislation. Some, for example, took issue with the relative weight given to sanctions versus rewards:

The most recent legislation is draconian since the punitive measures far outweigh the positive reinforcement strategies.

I feel [the new accountability legislation] is misguided and overly punitive.

Funding for intervention (promotion/retention) will be helpful. Cash incentives detrimental.

Other comments were more general. For example, one person wrote, "Great concern about performance index and treatment of principals."

- **The goal of five percent growth per year strikes some people as being unrealistic or unfair.**

Sanctions for failing to meet targets appear even more threatening when the targets do not seem achievable — another concern held by many districts. In both interviews and survey comments, several people raised questions about the goal of raising achievement by five percent each year. The Assistant to the Superintendent in one district mentioned in an interview that the district thinks they will be unable to reach what they see as the state's "unrealistically high goals." They expect that improvement will not be constant, but instead will come in spurts, and that requiring something like five percent improvement each year is not feasible.

Similarly, a Program Specialist in a different district expressed concerns about "unrealistic timelines" for improvement; she said her experience had been that improvement is not linear and that "you have to leave room for plateaus in achievement." A different administrator in this same district acknowledged that, for political reasons, the state needs to set high standards, but he felt that the standards needed to be reachable. He said that the "five percent rule" in the new legislation could cause as many as 70 percent of the district's schools to fail, depending on how it is interpreted. He does not want to see 60 to 70 percent of schools failing to meet the standards, and he is worried that the new system will be unfair to children.

The five percent growth goal even worries schools that already have high achievement. One principal of a high-performing school commented in an interview, "If you're high achieving, how much growth are you going to show?" Similarly, one survey respondent felt that the new legislation was "poorly crafted." The comment continued, "We have schools at the 85th percentile who will be designated as 'poor performing' if they do not go up 5 percent a year."

In the Next Chapter

Prior to the PSAA, districts' practices related to using consequences and incentives as a part of an accountability system were varied. But this does not mean that accountability was without impact at the local level. The impact of standards-based accountability systems in California school districts is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 10

Impact of Standards-Based Accountability Systems

Highlights of Findings

- **Districts and schools report that accountability has had some positive effects, especially on curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices.**
  Both survey results and interviews reveal that districts and schools express a cautious optimism about the positive impact of accountability. Many believe that greater accountability has led to a stronger focus on student achievement, even raising test scores. Moreover, the majority of districts — over 80 percent — believe that accountability has improved curriculum and instruction practices, making them more rigorous and tied to assessment. Over 70 percent of districts surveyed also said that accountability had a positive effect on classroom assessments.

- **At the same time, districts and schools report that accountability has lowered teacher morale.**
  While most districts surveyed reported a positive effect of accountability on most educational areas, over 40 percent of districts reported that teacher morale was adversely affected. Teachers are reporting frustration, powerlessness, and anxiety over changing state directives and the heightened pressure on them to raise test scores.

Because most districts' standards-based accountability systems have been in place for less than two years, it is too early to know for sure what effects, if any, these systems are having on student achievement. Even where evidence of improvement — or, in some cases, decline — exists, so many different reforms and initiatives have been undertaken simultaneously that one can only speculate about whether the observed changes are attributable to accountability measures.

Although improved student achievement is the most important goal, other outcomes, such as teacher morale, also are important because ultimately they affect student achievement. For these types of outcomes, it may not be too early to expect effects or to infer causality.

For the purposes of this study, the overarching research question on the topic of early impact of standards-based accountability systems was:

> ***What practices or features of a district's standards and accountability system are associated with particular educational outcomes?***

General Effects of Accountability

> *[Accountability] has had a positive impact on achievement already, and I think it has the potential to have a lot more....You can really make a change and show growth in achievement of students if you know what you're working toward, and you do some assessments or checks along the way to see how you're doing. It creates higher achievement; it creates also success among the staff, so that there's likelihood that that kind of thing is going to continue.*
>
> —*Principal*

- **Most district and school personnel believe that accountability has had or will have an overall positive impact.**

In general, districts seem to view accountability favorably, at least in the abstract, and think that, if done right, it will improve their students' education. Many district and school staff remarked positively on the effects of their accountability systems. Survey comments about the positive effects of accountability included:

> *Has everyone focused on student learnings and student outcomes.*
>
> *Has given positive motivation for change and upgrade of district curriculum.*
>
> *Accountability is* beginning *to raise expectations and achievement.*
>
> *Accountability has brought increased focus on achievement.*
>
> *Accountability has positively impacted how we teach and assess.*
>
> *Raises level of concern for ALL parties; focuses discussion and improvement efforts.*

At the school level, too, most people, particularly principals, do not seem to object to the concept of accountability or even to being held accountable personally. Several felt that

accountability either had already had positive effects or would have positive effects in the future. For example, one principal said that the state accountability thrust had had a huge impact on his whole school and that most of that impact had been positive. He explained that the focus had now shifted to student outcomes and he felt that was good, bringing a focus to instruction that in the past had been "sadly lacking." He also discussed how the focus on standards and outcomes meant "no more closed door" for teachers, which he felt was a change for the better.

Other principals, meanwhile, made statements to the effect of "we know we can do better," implying support for and responsiveness to new accountability measures:

> *Testing this year, with the push for accountability through SAT-9, has been an influence [over instruction]...We all are [held accountable]. We have standardized testing. We're accountable to parents, our grade-level colleagues, each other, our students. The district is reviewing the test scores, but we're not getting punished for it. There is a push from the district to get our scores up — only because they know we can do it. There is room for growth.*

> *I think the school, the staff feels that they are being held accountable, to the district standards, and also the state of California. Looking at the results, we know that we need to show improvement. ... In the end, I think the results are just a general recognition that they want to do better. If we have x percent of our kids reading on grade level, then we know that the same amount of kids could be performing math on grade level.*

> *We were just going along fat, dumb, and happy, and suddenly [as a result of the STAR test and accountability] someone is taking notice. It's a very public announcement of where we are, and an embarrassment. Our kids could be doing better.*

Effects on Policy, Practice, and Achievement

- **Districts reported that accountability had exercised a positive effect on curriculum and instruction, but not yet as much on student achievement.**

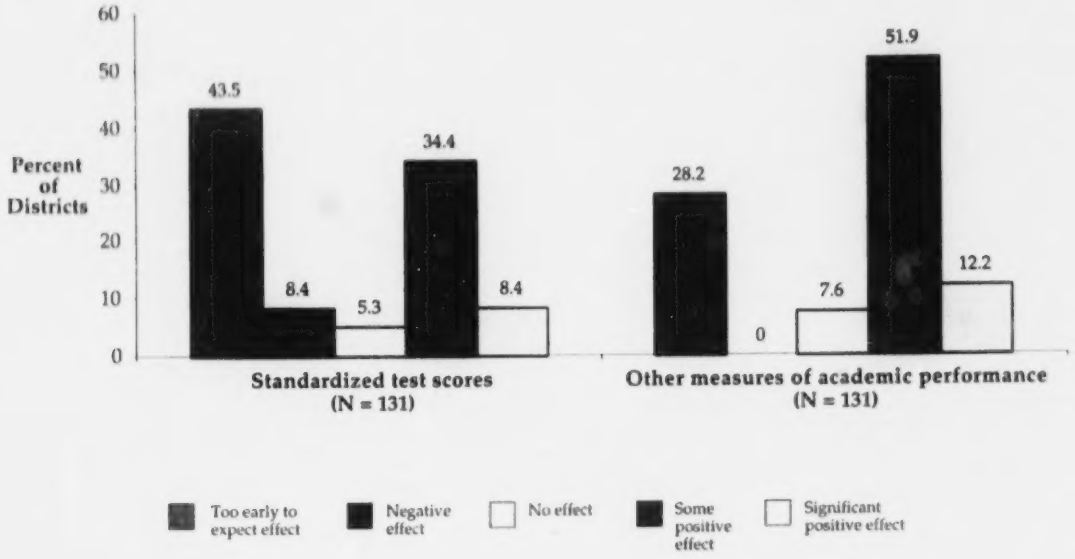
The survey asked districts about some of the specific effects of the accountability system. Overall, respondents were cautiously optimistic about most of these effects.

For example, as Figure 10.1 shows, in the opinion of 42.8 percent of survey respondents, their district accountability system or particular accountability components had exercised a positive effect on standardized test scores. Even more powerfully, 64.1 percent of the districts postulated a positive effect on student achievement on other measures of academic performance, possibly because of their closer alignment with curriculum. Interestingly, 8.4

percent of districts reported a *negative* effect on standardized test scores.[1] In contrast, not a single district noted a negative effect on student achievement on other measures of academic performance.

Figure 10.1

District Opinion About the Effects of Accountability on Measures of Student Achievement



Nevertheless, a large percentage of respondents thought that it was too early to expect an effect on student achievement (43.5 percent for standardized test scores, and 28.2 percent for other achievement measures). Student achievement, of course, is affected by many intervening factors, so it is not surprising that administrators are reluctant to attribute changes to accountability systems.

Survey respondents were more willing to indicate a positive effect on things that are more directly and easily controlled. As Figure 10.2 shows, over 80 percent of districts reported a positive effect on district-level curriculum and instruction policies and on district-level assessments; 88.6 percent said that the accountability system had had a positive effect on

[1] These results may be a function of the lack of alignment between content standards and the SAT-9. Districts that have fully adopted content standards and have aligned curriculum and instruction with these standards may well have faced a drop in standardized test scores, as the test was not aligned with standards. The paradoxical result is that districts that are advanced in implementing a standards-based accountability system may be getting penalized by a state assessment system that focuses on unaligned standardized tests.

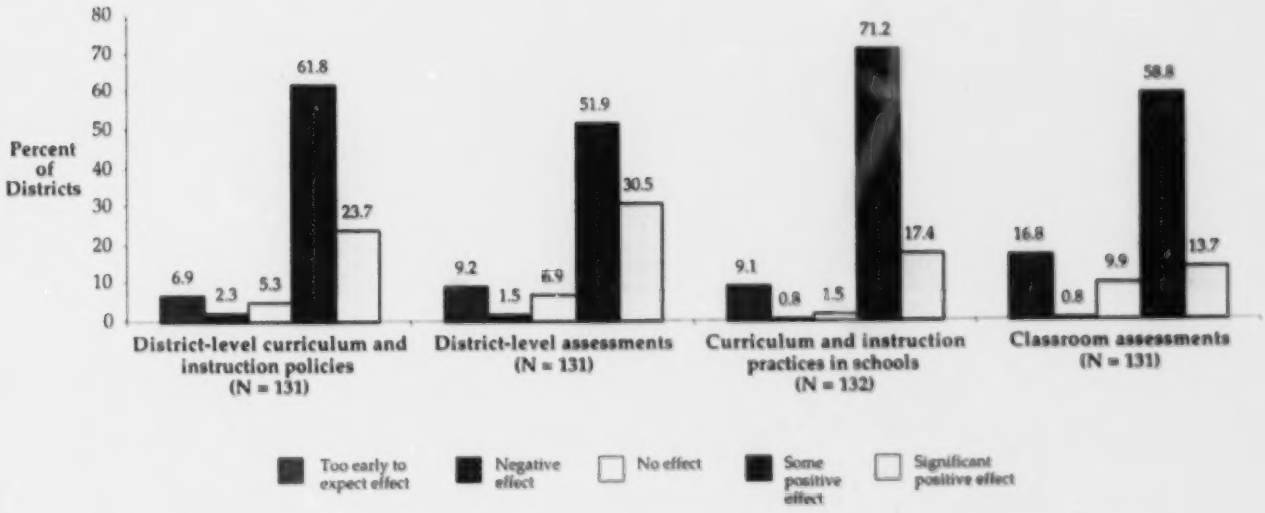
curriculum and instruction *practices* in schools. District comments along these lines included:

> *District has become more involved in curriculum and instruction as result of having to address state mandated system.*
>
> *Our accountability system is being revised in order to better measure student performance on content standards and also serve as useful information in guiding instruction.*
>
> *More rigorous curriculum and instruction are being implemented.*
>
> *Instruction gets focused on areas of the curriculum that are being assessed.*

In addition, 72.5 percent of survey respondents said that accountability had had a positive effect on classroom assessments. "Assessment is becoming an integral part of teacher practice," wrote one respondent.

Figure 10.2

District Opinion About the Effects of Accountability on Curriculum and Instruction and Assessment



Effects on Teacher Morale

All the principals are feeling it [accountability]; the teachers are starting to grasp it. The test scores are on the Internet, and in print. There's a lot inherent in raising test scores — it's tied to raising expectations. The bottom line is, we were doing our own thing. But now that people are looking — I don't mind it, if it's going to mean good things. I am afraid, though, that the fear will lead to paralysis.

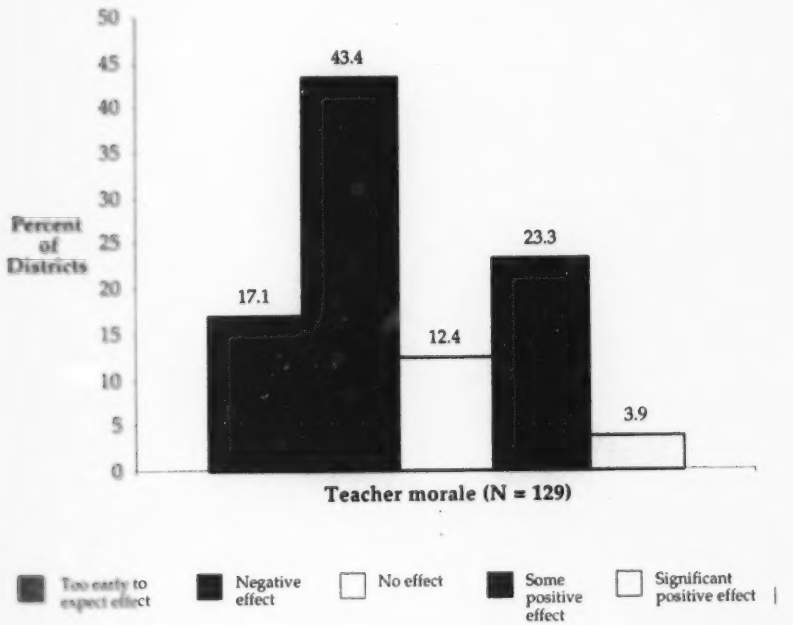
—Principal

- **Teacher morale has been a casualty of increased accountability, according to many districts and school staff.**

In contrast to the positive tone for many educational areas, the one area for which many respondents reported a *negative* effect was teacher morale. Over 40 percent of survey respondents said that the accountability system or particular accountability components had exercised a negative effect on teacher morale. (See Figure 10.3 and compare with Figures 10.1 and 10.2.)

Figure 10.3

District Opinion About the Effects of Accountability on Teacher Morale



Many survey respondents commented that teachers are feeling considerable stress and frustration as a result of accountability requirements:

> *The high stakes of this system has negatively impacted the morale of teachers and the climate at schools.*
>
> *Teachers are anxious about how they will be evaluated and possible job termination if their students' scores are low or do not show growth.*
>
> *The pressure to improve test scores has increased while teacher support has not, [leading to] increased anxiety level and low morale.*
>
> *Teachers are feeling tremendous pressure to succeed with every student even though many factors of student performance are not in their control.*
>
> *Being held accountable and all the testing time has made teachers very nervous and skittish.*
>
> *Teachers are feeling overwhelmed by the number of changes which have contributed to some expressions of frustration and inability to feel they are keeping up with expectations.*
>
> *The MANY different accountability systems have teachers concerned. They are frustrated that the systems do not address children who come to school unprepared. The current models do not show individual pupil growth, but rather only look at the end results.*
>
> *The changing nature of the state assessment, the proposed and potentially real "sanctions" contained in legislation create a sense of powerlessness and frustration — people are "living in fear" to a degree and see questionable to bad policy which they can't affect.*
>
> *The teacher morale and school climate is obviously negative. Continuation of such pressure will cause many qualified teachers and administrators to abandon the profession.*
>
> *Extremely stressful for teachers.*

Several principals also expressed concerns about what effect accountability would have on school staff — not only on teachers, but also on administrators. One principal mentioned that both teachers and administrators "are very fearful" and "somewhat resistant" to accountability measures; another principal indicated that there was a great deal of "self-induced paranoia and internal pressure" on the part of schools as a result of the new emphasis on accountability.

Interviews with teachers themselves did, indeed, reveal that many are frustrated with or skeptical about local accountability systems and measures. For many teachers, the greatest source of concern was the SAT-9, as discussed in Chapter 7, "Assessment Measures." Other teacher comments included:

> *I am really frustrated by it all. Politicians want to evaluate me based on how well my students do on an exam. That isn't fair, when we're lucky if 50% of the class does homework. There is no way that they are going to pass and it's not my fault. The district accountability is a joke. The content is not necessarily coordinated across the district. I know that the SAT-9 is the way of the future.*

> *Most accountability is aimed at the teachers. We're being held accountable by the district for making sure students are at performance level in the standards and in all areas on the SAT-9. It's a lot of pressure and stress. What they are doing is an excellent goal, it's just too fast without enough training time for teachers. It feels top-down.*

> *I don't believe that it [accountability] has influenced my teaching in a positive way, but there is more of an evaluation process…I don't believe that the system has been particularly effective.*

- **Accountability need not necessarily affect teachers negatively.**

Some teachers did, however, make positive remarks about accountability and even about being held accountable. Moreover, 27.2 percent of district survey respondents (see Figure 10.3) indicated that accountability had had a positive effect on teacher morale, and several respondents wrote comments about positive effects for teachers or for classroom instruction:

> *This [the accountability system] has given the teacher a more structured format from which to teach and evaluate student progress.*

> *Teachers always enjoy meeting to set directions in their subject area. Assessing these areas of direction gives them feedback that they haven't had in the past — they like knowing how their efforts are paying off.*

> *The system has helped the district's teachers and staff to focus on student learning.*

> *Teachers understand the target and can now make sure students are prepared.*

> *Greater emphasis on and awareness of our accountability system. Teachers are changing their focus in the classroom.*

> *Accountability is a role that the teachers and administration welcome — creating a positive direction for all staff, parents, and students.*

And one survey respondent who indicated a negative effect noted that "Teacher morale — high stress level, concern about low scores — should change with increase in scores." Thus, it would appear that under the right circumstances, accountability can have a positive effect on morale. Identifying the right circumstances and achieving them may, however, prove difficult.

Effects on Other Factors

- **Opinions of districts about the effects of accountability on other factors were mixed.**

Opinions on the effects of accountability on a wide variety of other factors — student attendance rates, drop-out rates, school climate, parent/community satisfaction, and parent involvement — were mixed. (See Figure 10.4.) Respondents were divided on whether it was too early to expect an effect on these factors, there was no effect, or there was a positive effect. For example, for parent involvement, 29 percent of respondents reported "too early to expect effect" in their districts, 35.1 percent reported "No effect," and another 35.1 percent reported a positive effect. (See the second part of Figure 10.4.)

Figure 10.4

District Opinion About the Effects of Accountability on Other Factors

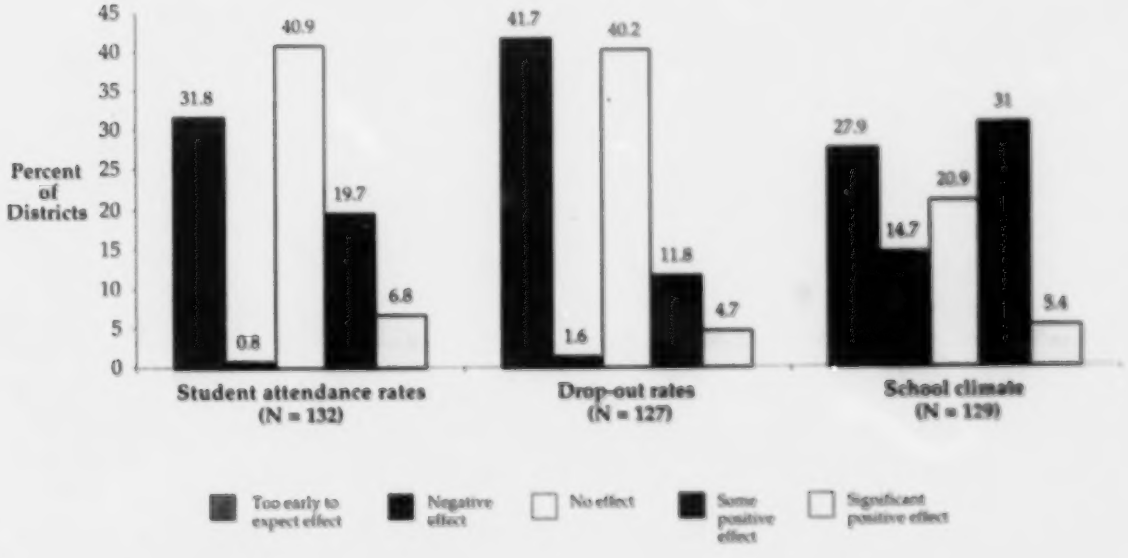
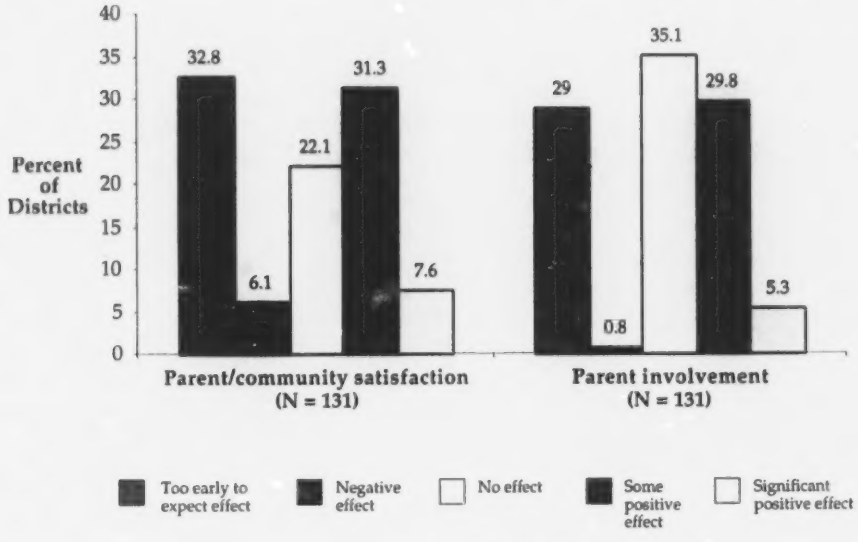


Figure 10.4 (continued)



In the Next Chapter

As this chapter has shown, local accountability systems had generated cautiously optimistic attitudes among both district- and school-level personnel, positive impact on consequences and incentives, and anxiety among teachers. Student achievement had not yet been significantly affected, in the opinion of most school districts. This mixed picture appears to be due, in part, to the significant challenges faced by districts, schools, and teachers in implementing accountability systems and raising student achievement. Districts' perceptions of these challenges and the forms of assistance that would help them are topics discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 11

Challenges and Assistance

Highlights of Findings

- **Districts have received assistance from a wide range of organizations in the development of their standards-based accountability systems.**
  More than half the districts have received assistance from CDE. Other common sources for support include county offices of education, other districts, and professional consultants. The most helpful assistance to districts from CDE has been in the areas of standards and development of multiple assessment measures.
- **Many district officials expressed frustration and confusion about the lack of a consistent, coherent, and/or fair statewide reform agenda.**
  Districts express great concern with their ability to keep up with the rapidly changing set of reforms initiated at the state level. The requirements associated with new initiatives are often unclearly communicated and sometimes send mixed messages about what is most important. Moreover, districts and school personnel complain that these reforms are not thoroughly tested or founded on solid research. Finally, districts believe that many expectations inherent in new state or federal initiatives are unfair, unreasonable, or technically unsound.
- **Districts have faced many specific challenges in developing and implementing key components of an accountability system.**
  Close to half the districts rated the following items as one of the top five most significant challenges they face:
  - aligning curriculum, instruction, assessment, and content standards
  - dealing with limited resources
  - finding or developing valid and reliable forms of assessment
  - making sure the system is equitable for all groups of students

  Gaining buy-in from teachers — and from others at the school level — so that reforms are actually implemented was also identified as a key challenge in district interviews.
- **Districts would like further assistance related to accountability.**
  In particular, districts seek more accountability-related professional development, assistance with the use of data, help in improving student and school performance, and models of successfully integrated accountability systems.

The development of an accountability system presents two major challenges. The first is designing a detailed, workable system that incorporates all the key components of accountability. The second is implementing it. Each of these challenges, of course, can be divided into numerous "sub-challenges." This chapter discusses what these challenges are and what forms of assistance districts said would be helpful in responding to the challenges they face.

For the purposes of this study, the overarching research questions on the topic of challenges and assistance were:

> ***What practices of the state education agency and other education-related institutions and assistance centers help or hinder districts in implementing their standards and accountability systems?***
>
> ***What obstacles do districts face in implementing a standards-based accountability system and how can the state education agency and other educational institutions and assistance centers help districts in overcoming those obstacles?***

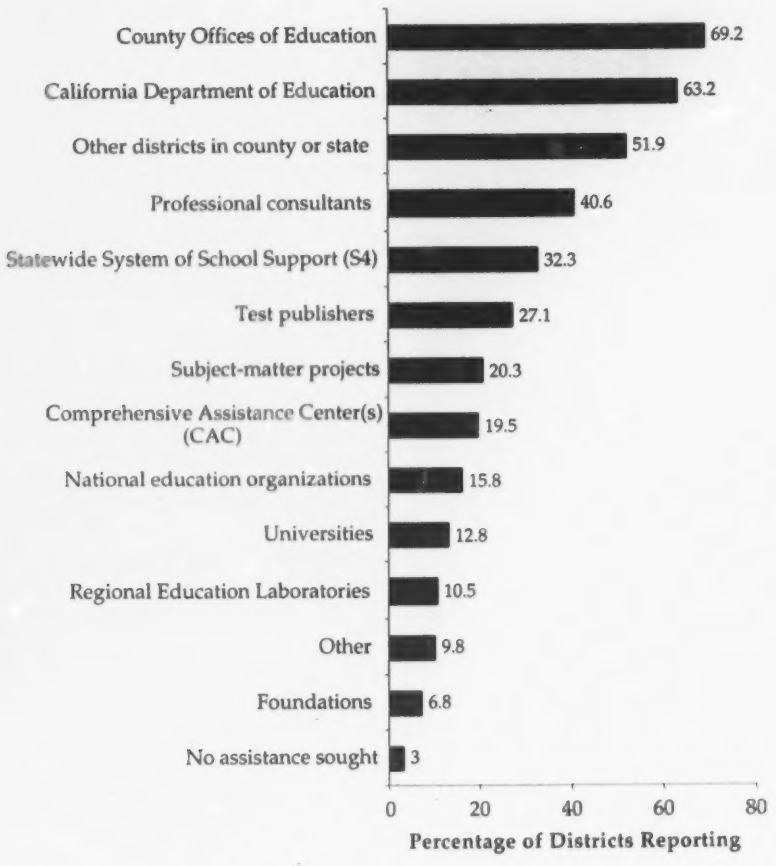
Practices that Help Districts in Implementing Their Accountability Systems

- **Several different organizations, including the California Department of Education, have provided helpful assistance to districts in implementing their standards-based accountability systems.**

Districts turn to a variety of organizations for help in implementing their standards-based accountability systems, as Figure 11.1 shows. Many districts (63.2 percent) reported on the survey that they have received assistance from CDE in developing, implementing, and refining their accountability systems. In fact, the only agency/organization that more districts reported assistance from than CDE was county offices of education (marked by 69.2 percent of respondents). Other agencies/organizations that many districts marked were "other districts in county or state" (51.9 percent of districts), professional consultants (40.6 percent of districts) and the Statewide System of School Support (S4) (32.3 percent of districts).

Figure 11.1

District Reporting of Sources of Accountability Help
(N = 133)



Nearly all survey respondents (128 of 132) reported that, over the past year, they or someone from their district had participated in workshops for districts related to standards-based accountability. Overall, respondents were almost evenly divided between rating these workshops as "somewhat helpful" and rating the workshops as "very helpful." Only four respondents said they had attended workshops that were "not helpful." Apparently, the workshops that are available to districts from a variety of sources have been successful.

Some district staff who were interviewed discussed what they had found to be helpful, not just about workshops, but in general. For example, one administrator mentioned that her

participation in various state committees had been helpful, such as in understanding the standards, and that she was able to take back to her district what she learned from being on these committees. She also appreciated the state's "try it and see what happens" attitude, giving the district flexibility and leeway to experiment with new ideas.

An administrator in a different district said that although the district relies mostly on in-house staff and assistance, they do attend informational CDE meetings. Also, this administrator noted, the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) program has been very helpful for new teachers. (A few first-year mathematics teachers who were interviewed also mentioned BTSA as having been helpful to them.)

Administrators in a third district stated that they had recently received some assistance from CDE, from their County Office of Education, and from the Comprehensive Assistance Center. Most of this assistance, however, seemed to be aimed at implementation of the various provisions of categorical programs (e.g. CCR, PQR) rather than at accountability systems *per se*.

- **Districts were particularly positive about the assistance they received related to content standards and multiple measures.**

When asked whether any particular state-level practices or documents had helped districts to develop and implement their accountability systems, 76 of 130 respondents (58.5 percent) replied "yes." Documents that many districts listed as being "most useful" included the CDE Multiple Measures Guidelines/Ruth Ann McKenna (1998) Memo (33.3 percent of districts) and the state content standards (29.2 percent of districts).

Similarly, when asked to rate the communication from the California Department of Education about state and federal expectations/requirements in a variety of areas, areas that received the highest ratings had to do with content standards and multiple measures. More than half of responding districts rated communication about "developing adopting, and implementing content standards" to be good or very good, and 47.8 percent rated communication about "combining multiple measures to determine whether students meet grade level standards" to be good or very good.

Content standards and multiple measures were also the areas for which many districts felt they had received strong support. When asked to rate the support their districts had received in several different areas, areas rated highly ("good" or "very good") by survey respondents included "developing, adopting, and implementing content standards" (67.3 percent of respondents) and "combining multiple measures to determine whether students meet grade level standards" (63.5 percent of respondents).

Major Obstacles for Districts in Implementing Accountability Systems

Although 58.5 percent of districts reported that particular state-level practices or documents had helped them in developing and implementing their accountability systems, nearly as many—57 percent—also stated that there were particular state-level practices of documents that had *hindered* them. As discussed in the chapter on assessment measures, respondents frequently mentioned the use of a norm-referenced test (the SAT-9) and the requirement that all students be tested in English as obstacles that districts face. Other frequently cited hindrances included the "layering" of requirements, frequent policy changes, and political factors. These challenges will be discussed further in this section.

- **The addition of new requirements without the elimination of older ones causes a strain on districts. It also sends mixed messages about what is important.**

Several state-level officials who were interviewed commented that the addition of new requirements and expectations without the elimination of older ones creates problems for districts. For example, they pointed out that school districts are still required to undergo inspection by state teams or to follow state procedures to complete Coordinated Compliance Reviews (CCR) and Program Quality Reviews (PQR). Secondary schools, to be accredited, undergo periodic reviews by teams from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). Teachers are required to develop objectives and be evaluated consistent with the requirements of the Stull Bill.

State officials suggested that each of these requirements, and probably others, sends a slightly different message about what is important and what is expected, and all drain significant time and energies that could be devoted to focusing on student achievement. Some district administrators made similar comments. They suggested that the "layering" of new requirements on top of existing mandates adds a great deal of work and paperwork and causes a strain on resources that are already taxed. (Resources will be discussed further in the following section.) One large-district administrator, for example, expressed the opinion that the state does not take into account the "real costs" associated with implementing social promotion policies, class size reduction, and all the other recent interventions "heaped" on districts. He said that not "pruning out" older policies and interventions, such as CCR and PQR, stretches district resources even thinner.

Moreover, the continuation of all of the different requirements has philosophical as well as practical implications. CDE administrators suggested that the underlying premise of a modern education accountability system is that schools, districts, and individuals should be

held responsible for *student outcomes*. To the extent that the state and other entities prescribe *processes*, schools, districts, and individuals may find it more difficult to focus on improving outcomes. For example, various categorical programs are replete with planning, reporting, and other procedural requirements that prescribe how local educators should proceed, rather than how they will be held responsible for improving student outcomes. As one district administrator wrote on the survey, "CCR, PQR, WASC-FOL are antiquated procedures. Eliminate them and rely upon student performance indicators *alone*."

- **The frequent changes in state requirements, and the lack of coordination between different state initiatives, vexes district and school personnel.**

> *We were using [a particular program] and the results were positive. However, it was in and then out. Now we're on to something else and I can't begin to tell you why—I do as I am told.*
>
> *—Principal*

For some, the problem is not that previous policies are kept, but rather that they are thrown out before they have a chance to prove effective. In interviews, some administrators voiced concerns about "constantly changing requirements." They said they feel that districts work hard on designing a reform, but, before they have time to fully implement it and see if it works, they are told to replace it with something else.[1] This causes considerable frustration over the waste of previous efforts.

Moreover, constant changes foster an attitude of "this too shall pass." In the experience of administrators who were interviewed, people at both district and school levels have seen so many reforms come and go that they have learned not to get personally invested in any of them. For example, the superintendent of one small district said that he did try to involve many people and the community in the policy adoption process vis-à-vis accountability. Most staff, however, had the attitude that reforms come and go without any real impact, and they thought that this one (about accountability) wouldn't really come to pass either. An administrator in a different district felt that "accountability" was just "the latest buzz word."

A few people at the school level, as well, expressed frustration over the rapid pace of change. One principal, for instance, commented in an interview that the state needs to slow down, let the dust settle, and let schools see what is and is not working. She indicated that she likes thoughtful change and feels that the current reforms have been much too rushed. In her opinion, the state needs to realize that everyone is experiencing change anxiety and

[1] The passage of the PSAA has exacerbated this sentiment. For example, administrators in one district said that they wished they could have another couple of years to see if their current system was working before having to change over to the new state system. They would like to see some sort of waiver process through which, if they could prove their system was working, they would be exempt from parts of the state requirements.

that it is tremendously stressful for administrators and teachers. She reported hearing more and more staff say, "I can't keep up this pace; I'm going to get out of education." She is worried that they will be losing their best teachers and administrators because of this.

The survey, too, generated numerous comments about how difficult it has been for districts to keep up with a parade of ever-changing, often-uncoordinated policies and requirements. Among the state-level "practices" that were mentioned by districts as hindrances were the following:

> *Lack of long-term consistent process for measuring student achievement.*
>
> *Asking us to create a plan as though it will be our call and later changing to a state plan.*
>
> *Late notification, uncertainty at state level, changes by State Board, expectation that districts develop and then change to meet state requirements at a later date.*
>
> *State testing program changes every year.*
>
> *The CDE's constant changes.*
>
> *Lack of consistent requirements—we need a sustained focus over enough time to yield meaningful information.*
>
> *It has been like trying to learn to ride a horse that you got on half way to a destination that keeps changing i.e. designing grade level assessments without guidance of defined state performance standards.*
>
> *Inability of state to evaluate and adopt a system that is consistent, based on proven implementation, with professional development attached.*
>
> *Constantly changing state legislation.*
>
> *State system not consistent year to year.*
>
> *Putting a system together in a piecemeal fashion and acting like it means something to public.*

As with this last remark, several districts criticized the state for its lack of consistency not only over time but also across the new policies that have recently been instituted. State-level practices, wrote one survey respondent, "are not well coordinated." A district administrator who was interviewed recommended that "the state adopt a coherent plan and stick with it."

State policymakers who were interviewed—legislators, Governor's Office officials, State Board members, etc.—acknowledged that there is still a long way to go before all the pieces of the accountability system are fully aligned. Besides the standards, testing, and consequences components, a number of other initiatives will have a major impact on accountability: staff development, the state high school exit exam, teacher preparation, teacher quality, class size reduction, school finance (both adequacy and equity), and collective bargaining. State policymakers agreed that aligning all of these various initiatives is vitally important, and they urged the state and the public to have the patience and persistence to see the process through until alignment can take place. The key, they admitted, will be long term commitment and an "appropriate balance between idealism and pragmatism." They view accountability as a long-range project that, to be successful, will take extraordinary effort over time. Whether they have communicated this view to implementers up and down the educational ladder, as well as parents, remains an open question. (Communication issues will be discussed later in this chapter.)

- **Political and organizational dynamics are partly responsible for the apparent lack of consistency and coordination.**

To some extent, the apparent lack of consistency and coordination between various policies stems from political or organizational factors. One district administrator who was interviewed speculated that state policy tends to be driven "more by politics than good education." On the survey, as well, several respondents attributed the lack of consistency and coordination to state-level political dynamics, and they cited various political or governance-related factors as hindrances in their development of accountability systems:

> *Target continues to move as various political forces propose their solutions.*
>
> *Politics and arguing of what standards should be adopted.*
>
> *Legislation vs. CDE guidance not coordinated over time (0 credibility); site left to deliver multiple often contradictory directives.*
>
> *Legislative, political vs. research-based practices.*
>
> *Lack of collaboration among state level personnel.*

The "lack of collaboration among state-level personnel" was also discussed by state personnel themselves. CDE officials who were interviewed noted that elements of

accountability are located in at least four divisions[2], reporting directly to two Deputy Superintendents and one Chief Deputy Superintendent. Division titles provide few clues as to where the various functions reside. The Standards, Curriculum and Assessment Division apparently has responsibility for neither standards nor curriculum. Neither that division nor the School and District Accountability Division reports to the Chief Deputy for Educational Policy, Finance, and Accountability. Of the four, only the Office of Policy and Evaluation, which is responsible for managing the school report card program, does report to the Chief Deputy for Educational Policy, Finance, and Accountability.[3]

In this environment, CDE administrators suggested, it has been extremely difficult to coordinate related activities or even communicate between key actors. For example, differences between the Office of Policy and Evaluation and the Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Division theoretically would have to be referred to the Superintendent to be resolved. In other words, in the opinion of most of the staff who were interviewed, responsibility for accountability-related functions has been fragmented within CDE. Coordination among the various divisions appears to be mostly informal and largely the result of long-established working relationships among the division directors rather than any coherent plan. (The new reorganization may, however, help address these problems.)

Indeed, until recently, there has not appeared to be a Department-wide strategy or vision of accountability. Department administrators attribute much of the lack of clarity in this area to the often-contentious relationship between the State Board of Education and the Superintendent and her staff during the past several years.

Political dynamics at the district level, as well as at the state level, can also interfere with accountability systems. For example, one district administrator commented that ever-changing district leadership has discouraged further action on the implementation of an accountability system; this district has had three superintendents in as many years. A change in superintendency in another district that was visited also has had a powerful impact on the accountability system, causing it to change course midstream.

- **The majority of districts do not believe that the expectations and requirements for districts with regard to accountability are fair and reasonable.**

When asked, "Do you believe that state and federal expectations/requirements with regard to accountability and districts' roles in accountability are fair and reasonable?," 59.2 percent of survey respondents replied "no." Many of the reasons given for "no" responses were similar to those discussed above and in previous chapters: use of a norm-referenced test,

[2] Elementary Education Division; Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Division; School and District Accountability Division; and the Office of Policy and Evaluation.
[3] Since conducting the state interviews, we have learned that CDE has taken steps to consolidate related functions. However, it is too soon to comment on the nature of the reorganization.

lack of consistency and coordination at the state level, and so on. Many, however, expressed concerns about the state expectations and goals for student achievement, which, until the passage of the PSAA, aimed for 90 percent of students meeting or exceeding grade-level standards by 2007 (McKenna, 1997; CDE, 1998a):

> *90% meeting grade level standards within 10 years—not realistic.*
>
> *The goal of 90% of students reaching standards is absurd until society changes and all students come to school ready to learn and parents do their part.*
>
> *Federal expectations in 1994 IASA reauthorization are OK. California's are not fair and very unreasonable—90% of all students at or above grade level.*
>
> *The 90% above grade level goal by 2007 is not logical, appropriate, or realistic!*

For many respondents, the issue was one of equity.[4] Many people felt that it was unfair for the state not to factor in differences among schools and students in terms of socioeconomic status, language differences, special education, etc:

> *All 8th grade students are not college bound, not all students are capable of grade level performance.*
>
> *Too simplistic; treat all schools as though clients have identical needs.*
>
> *State expectations do not address uneven playing fields among schools.*
>
> *Doesn't account for student differences.*
>
> *[Expectations are] only [fair] if we look at subgroups of students and give credit for progress toward targets.*
>
> *Clearly schools in the higher SES will have the advantage.*
>
> *Poverty and LEP status influence student scores more than instructional practices (i.e., good teaching is happening in "low performing school").*
>
> *LEP student needs are ignored.*
>
> *No reasonable provisions for English language learners.*

[4] Developing an equitable accountability system was another challenge cited by some districts, especially in interviews.

State does not factor in certain issues like English proficiency. Our fear is the schools that most need stability will be least likely to achieve such.

Special Ed and LEP included are not reasonable.

For some survey respondents, the source of unfairness in state expectations and requirements was not differences among students and schools, but rather among *districts*. As one person put it, "One shoe does not fit all feet! State and Federal tend to look at every district the same and they are not." Conversations with representatives from rural districts reveal that these districts, in particular, fiercely resent "one-size-fits-all" accountability schemes.

Specific Challenges at the District Level

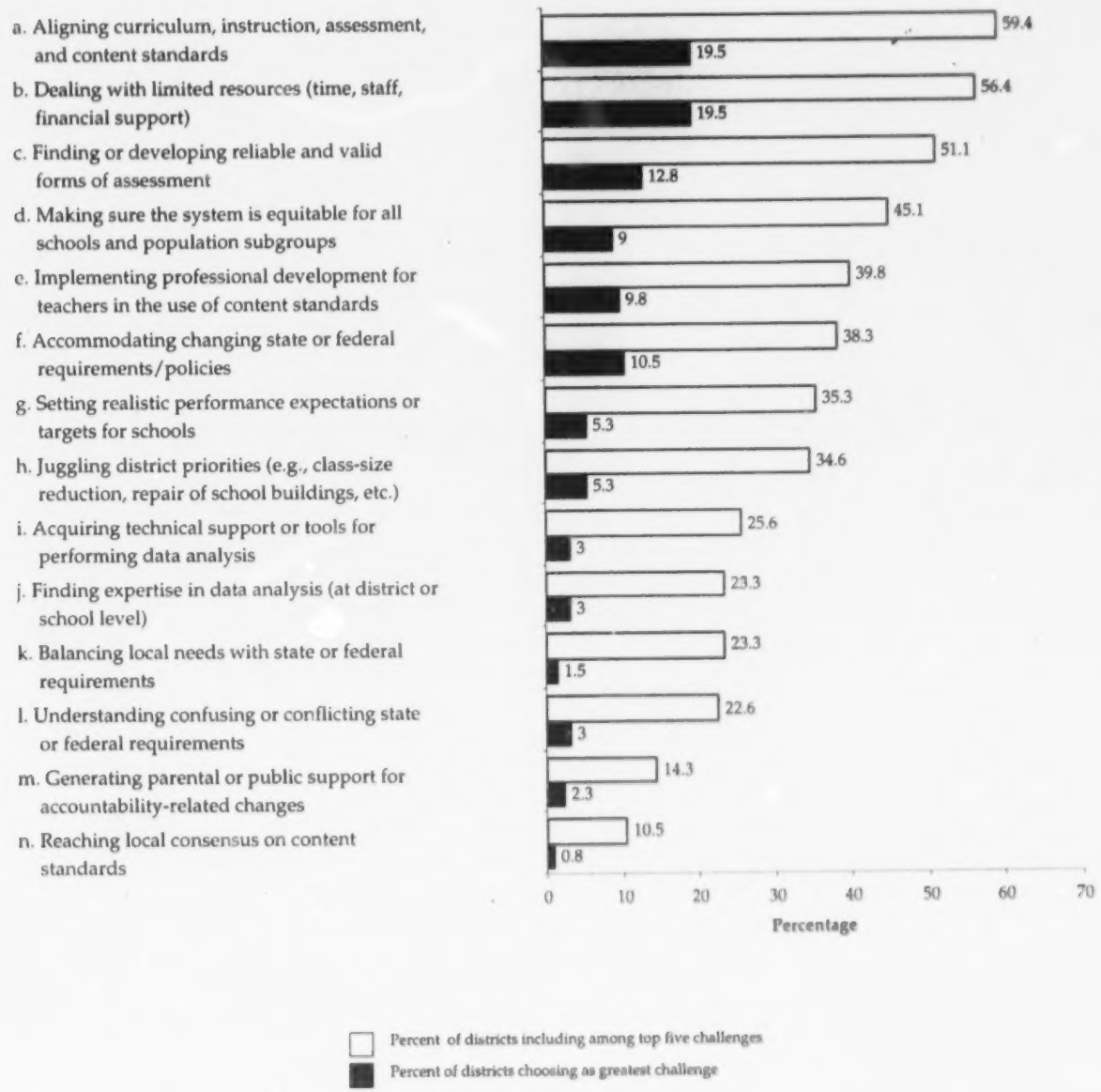
- **Districts face many challenges in developing and implementing their accountability systems. The most important challenges reported on the survey relate to alignment, resources, assessment, equity, professional development, and changing requirements.**

Figure 11.2 presents a list from the questionnaire of 14 possible challenges districts might face in developing and implementing their accountability systems, and it shows the proportion of survey respondents who selected each area as one of their district's "top five challenges." As the figure shows, districts selected the following items most frequently:

- aligning curriculum, instruction, assessment, and content standards
- dealing with limited resources (time, staff, financial support)
- finding or developing reliable and valid forms of assessment
- making sure the system is equitable for all schools and population subgroups
- implementing professional development for teachers in the use of content standards
- accommodating changing state or federal requirements/policies

Figure 11.2

District Rankings of Challenges for Developing and Implementing a Standards-Based Accountability System
(N = 113)



Several of these items have been discussed in previous chapters or earlier in this chapter. The rest of this section elaborates further on the remaining items and on other challenges mentioned not only by districts but also by schools and by state-level policymakers and policy implementers.

- **Creating buy-in from teachers, implementing changes at the classroom level, and improving student performance were challenges mentioned by several districts.**

"Creating buy-in" and "implementing changes in the classroom" were not listed as options on the survey question about challenges faced by districts. Both, however, were mentioned frequently in district interviews in response to the question, "What do you see as the biggest challenges to implementing a successful accountability system in your district?" In almost all districts where interviews occurred, administrators expressed concern that understanding about accountability had not filtered down to the classroom teacher. In addition, many suggested that lack of buy-in by teachers would hinder the successful implementation of any accountability measures.

In one district, for example, a Program Specialist said that one of the biggest challenges was getting everyone to buy into the system and to understand why it is important. Another challenge, this person said, was in building the system down to the classroom level. A Director of Research and Evaluation in a different district commented similarly that a major challenge is achieving consensus and overcoming staff resistance; staff, the administrator continued, have to agree and buy into what they are being evaluated on. The Superintendent in a third district, too, said that the greatest challenge is getting the message to people and getting them to respond. Finally, a district administrator in yet another district stated that the biggest challenge was changing the beliefs and expectations of education professionals.

State policymakers also discussed the importance of buy-in. They generally agreed that a high degree of local buy-in is essential to the success of any accountability system. Accountability cannot be solely top-down, they emphasized; in order to be truly effective, it must also become bottom-up reform. They felt that the real test will be whether people at all levels of the system, particularly teachers, become committed to the idea of accountability, or if they will continue to see it as an outside scheme imposed by the state. The policymakers who were interviewed also expressed the concern that others at the state level may underrate the difficulty of attaining this important goal.

- **Communication-related issues, such as lack of clarity in state directives and delayed information, have created challenges for many districts.**

As discussed earlier in this chapter, CDE communication regarding content standards and multiple measures was rated highly on the survey. In other accountability-related areas, however, CDE communication scored less well. For example, one area in which CDE communication received low marks was data analysis. With respect to "analyzing assessment and other data," 36.9 percent of respondents rated CDE communication as poor and 40 percent rated it as fair.

Districts were also somewhat negative about communication regarding the improvement of student and school performance. For "improving student performance," 37 percent of survey districts rated CDE communication as poor, and another 37 percent rated it only as "fair." Similarly, for "improving school performance," 34.4 percent of districts thought CDE communication was "poor," and 39.8 percent marked "fair."[5]

Although the survey did not ask districts to explain their communication ratings, it seems likely that the low ratings in these two areas stemmed from a *lack* of communication rather than from *unclear* communication. A few respondents wrote comments to this effect next to the "improving school performance" and "improving student performance" items: "These have not been addressed by the Calif. D.O.E." wrote one person; another asked, "Has there been any [communication in these areas]?" Also, respondents were more likely to leave these two items blank or to answer "don't know" than they were for the other communication-related items.

A superintendent who was interviewed also commented on a lack of communication. He mentioned that when he wants information on what is happening at the state level, he feels that he has to actively go get it. "If you just wait for information to come to you," he said, "you're lost."

Some districts did cite a lack of clarity in state directives as having hindered them in developing and implementing their accountability systems. One district administrator who was interviewed said that the accountability measures in the new legislation are not clear and that "the whole message never gets out"; the new rules are too confusing and too complex, she felt, and districts are getting multiple contradictory messages. Survey comments about how lack of clarity in state guidelines had hindered districts included:

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[5] These two areas—improving student performance and improving school performance—were also the areas in which districts felt that they had received the least helpful *support*. Fifty-six percent of districts rated the support they had received in improving student performance as poor or fair, and 55 percent rated the support they had received in improving school performance as poor or fair.

Not giving clear standards for district to follow. For small districts this has been a difficult process.

Bulletins gave discrepant information. We are still trying to get information regarding 8th grade algebra.

The state level documents tend to be confusing.

Unclear expectations.

Lack of clarity in directions during early years of the program.

The timing of CDE-issued information was another communication-related area that some districts commented on. Several survey respondents commented that slowness at the state level had hindered their districts' development of accountability components:

The "late" issuance of guidelines and procedures.

Standards were very slow in coming.

The slow political process of establishing state performance standards and curriculum alignment via textbooks and standards-based assessments.

Similar comments came up in district interviews. One district administrator, for example, expressed the concern that CDE has a problem with "procrastination" and takes too long to disseminate information. Moreover, several administrators commented that their districts had expended considerable efforts in developing content standards or in devising systems for combining multiple measures, only to be told *later* by the state what was and was not acceptable. Districts suggested that this led to a lot of wasted effort, additional work, and bad feeling.

Case Study of Miscommunication: "90 percent of students doing what?"

A case-in-point where miscommunication is concerned relates to the state goal of 90 percent of students meeting or exceeding grade-level standards by 2007.[6] Some districts interpreted this goal to mean that by 2007, 90 percent of students had to be scoring above the 50th percentile on the SAT-9. Based on the number of districts who commented on the survey about the statistical implausibility of such a goal, this was a fairly widespread misconception:

Statistically, having 90% of all students above the 50th percentile does not make sense.

Thinking that 90% of students can be above the 50th percentile on an NRT [is unreasonable]. This must be Lake Wobegon!

Goal of 90% of students is statistically impossible. They will renorm SAT.

State concept of everyone at or above the 50th percentile is incredibly flawed. Someone at the state needs to understand populations, statistics, and assessment!

Some students will always fall below the 50th percentile on norm referenced tests. Getting everyone above the 50th percentile is statistically impossible.

With SAT-9 the 90% proficiency by 2007 is not statistically attainable.

Even one teacher who was interviewed commented on this statistical riddle. "None of this really makes sense to me," she said, "because statistically you *have* to have [people] below the 50th percentile. I mean, the 50th percentile is the middle mark, you can't have nobody below the middle."

How did so many people form the impression that the goal was to have 90 percent of students above the 50th percentile? It is difficult to say for sure. However, it seems likely that it was a result of miscommunication or misinterpretation of state documents.

In particular, an accountability packet (Fausset, 1998) distributed to districts by CDE on July 20, 1998 included several different pieces. One piece, the "Summary of Guidelines for Identifying Title I Schools for Program Improvement: Refinements for 1997–98" (CDE, 1998a), mentioned the state goal of "90 percent of students meeting or exceeding grade-level standards." Another piece included in the packet was "Frequently Asked Questions About Standards-Based Accountability, Spring 1998" (CDE, 1998, Spring). One of the "frequently asked questions" cited in this document was, "What is the rationale for using the 50th percentile as the grade-level standard on a norm-referenced test?" The answer given was the following:

The 50th percentile is an interim standard or benchmark for norm-referenced assessment like the SAT-9.... The 50th percentile was selected because California cannot justify an expectation for our students that is lower than the current national average.

(continues)

[6] This goal mostly likely will be eliminated with the adoption of a new statewide target as required under the PSAA.

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Case Study of Miscommunication — continued

It seems conceivable that many districts may have interpreted this to mean that in order for students to meet grade level standards, they must score at or above the 50th percentile on the SAT-9. Thus, given the goal of 90 percent of students meeting or exceeding grade level standards, it is a short leap to the assumption that this means 90 percent of students scoring above the 50th percentile.

- **Districts voiced concerns about having insufficient time to meet reporting requirements and to make the multiple changes and implement the new systems required by the state.**

Other "hindrances" that many districts cited on the survey had to do with limited time. A few districts complained that the amount of time needed to satisfy state reporting requirements was excessive:

> *Too many reports, too much paperwork.*
>
> *We feel that the burden of state and federal accountability is onerous. Too much time is taken away from our main job: educating kids!*
>
> *Multiple requirements (CCR, WASC, accountability report cards, categorical programs) which aren't particularly useful and take too much time.*

In addition, numerous districts made remarks on the survey about "short timelines," "too much too soon," and "too many changes, too fast!" Some elaborated further:

> *Too much required too quickly. Need time and resources to implement standards and accountability system.*
>
> *Process used for developing standards for Eng./Lang. Arts and Math were not conducive to easy implementation—still very controversial. Way too much at once.*
>
> *Challenges to report on SASR data before system could be in place to aggregate/disaggregate data.*
>
> *Not enough lead time to develop program to capture newly required reporting data.*

Concerns about "unrealistic timelines" also came up in interviews with district administrators. Some commented that they felt that timelines were being driven by politicians, rather than by realistic educational goals. They pointed out that it takes a long time to develop each piece of the system; rushing it, they suggested, leads to poorly designed, badly flawed systems.[7]

- **Some districts cited insufficient resources as a major hindrance to their accountability efforts.**

Lack of time and other resources appears to have been a particular issue with smaller districts. Some smaller districts commented on the survey that, as a result of their size, they were at a disadvantage in terms of meeting state requirements:

> *Not enough support for smaller districts.*
>
> *Not always reasonable timelines for small districts with 1 or 2 people responsible for organization, preparation, and submission of accountability info.*
>
> *Small rural districts have unique needs and problems meeting requirements.*

Conversations with representatives from rural districts yielded similar remarks. Rural districts feel strongly that they simply cannot respond appropriately to the State's accountability thrust without additional resources.

Some large districts, too, commented on a lack of resources—particularly discretionary, non-targeted resources. The Assistant to the Superintendent in one large district voiced a desire for more resources without strings attached, controlled at the local level. For instance, the district already has "safety system infrastructure" up and running, so new funds from the state earmarked for that would not be helpful. However, the district is badly in need of funding for facilities and maintenance (the schools are very old and crowded), for textbooks, and for funding innovations. District administrators suggested that funding is now so targeted that districts do not have the money they need to hire additional staff to oversee assessment, for instance, or to institute student data tracking systems.

[7] Even some state-level policymakers acknowledged that accountability is very complex, perhaps too complex for successful implementation, especially in the time allotted.

- **A lack of resources at the state level is problematic for districts seeking assistance as well as for CDE officials trying to provide leadership for accountability.**

The state itself has limited resources to work with, as some districts acknowledged. One district administrator, when asked what additional assistance he would like from the state, replied that CDE had been cut back so much that it was hard to imagine what support they could give. Similarly, a survey respondent commented:

> *CA Dept. of Education is devastated by budget cuts, etc. Other out-of-state districts have developed excellent models. However, many of these districts are spending $40,000+ per student; we spend $5,000 per student.*

Unsurprisingly, CDE's lack of resources was also mentioned by numerous state officials. Virtually every person interviewed at the state level, at CDE and elsewhere, mentioned that CDE lacked sufficient resources to provide the leadership necessary to successfully implement any accountability program. State policymakers, for example, expressed much skepticism about CDE's capacity to administer the accountability system, given the quantity of things that need to be done on an extremely constricted timeline, and given CDE's limited resources. In part because of this limited capacity, state policymakers expressed very little confidence in takeover by the Superintendent of Public Instruction as a way to materially improve school performance.

CDE administrators were particularly candid in their admission that the Department was unable to assist districts or even to enforce compliance in any meaningful way. Several commented that over the past decade, resources available to the Department have been reduced dramatically. The quantity and in some cases the quality of staff have suffered, in the opinion of some people who were interviewed. Operating budgets have been cut repeatedly. Salary levels are no longer competitive with those paid to local educators, making it more and more difficult to attract high-caliber talent to work in the Department. This situation is likely to be exacerbated, said officials, as more experienced employees leave the agency.

Although CDE resources have been cut severely, expectations and responsibilities required of the Department have not been reduced concomitantly, according to Department officials who were interviewed. Quite to the contrary, they said, new and expanded expectations have been added to existing expectations. Accountability is just the most recent example of this problem. The results of this practice are predictable, suggested the people who were interviewed: when it is impossible to do everything, some things will not be done well and others will not be done at all.

District Spotlight: Plight of a Medium-Sized District

An interview with administrators from one medium-sized district highlighted many of the challenges discussed in this chapter. Although this district's Consolidated Application Accountability Plan received an "exemplary" rating from CDE, administrators did not feel they had any promising strategies to share with other districts. If anything, they felt that their district was an example of how the system was *not* working.

They reported that they are in a condition of continual triage in an effort to meet a flood of state requirements. All of their time and resources, they said, are spent meeting the letter of the law, and they do not have the time to actually develop the programs necessary to implement the spirit of the law. They feel hindered in their efforts by the state's rapidly changing requirements, its failure to eliminate previous requirements, its failure to provide districts with clear and timely information about changes, and its failure to provide the necessary resources.

Constantly Changing Requirements. District staff felt that the state requirements resulted from a political process rather than from a well thought-out educational process, and that the legislature is out of touch with how districts actually work. They want the state to lay out a clear long-term vision of how accountability is going to work in California, rather than the current piecemeal approach. They also want to see a reasonable timeline with sequential reforms and a plan of how it is going to be phased in.

Timing of Information from CDE. The administrators interviewed cited several specific instances when the lack of timely information from CDE caused the district to have to redo programs it had already put significant time and resources into. In one instance, they spent a year developing a rubric for combining multiple measures, which then had to be discarded when the state guidelines were disseminated. In another instance, committees spent untold hours developing a local assessment to satisfy the multiple measures requirement. Then they heard from CDE that the multiple measures reporting system may not even be required this year. (At the time of this interview, in mid-July of 1999, they still had not received final notification about this.) In their opinion, April or May is too late to notify districts about reporting requirements for that year. District staff said that this kind of thing has serious effects on teacher and administrator morale, and that staff are now much less willing to work on these types of projects. The best teachers and administrators are burning out and leaving.

New Requirements Without Eliminating Old. District staff were unhappy with how the state was layering requirements on districts, instituting new mandates without eliminating old ones. They said that the paperwork that came with funding opportunities was often so great that it was not worthwhile to apply, and that it was creating a substantial burden on staff. The current staff do not have the time to deal with the additional requirements, but, because the funding is almost all targeted now, there is no money to hire additional people. Some of the key clerical staff have left, after having worked out of classification and having put in substantial overtime for years. One administrator commented that the state is moving to an accountability system based on outputs, but it is still controlling the inputs.

(continues)

District Spotlight — continued

Unrealistic Timelines. District staff said that they were rushing to meet the state requirements, but that they never had time to design programs that were good. They also noted that the sequence of requirements often did not make sense. For instance, they had to begin reporting for the Consolidated Application before they had standards and assessments in place, so the data were not comparable from year to year.

Limited Resources. District officials cited understaffing as the biggest challenge the district faces. They said they were an administrator-poor district, and there was no slack in the system that they could use to accommodate the new requirements. Developing multiple measures for each grade level was an incredible strain on the district staff, and they felt that it was unreasonable to expect each district to come up with its own measures. Moreover, while they collect all the student data, they do not have the time to analyze any of it. They would like to be able to assess their program at the district level, identify weaknesses, and institute programs to address them, but they do not have the time or the resources to do this. Another example they pointed to was the program they are developing to end social promotion. The program will allow them to identify students below grade level, but it ends there—they do not have the diagnostic system necessary to help them figure out how to address those students' needs. In other words, the district provides "quick fixes" to respond to the state requirements, but does not have the time or resources to really develop programs or make them work. The targeted funding does not allow them to hire the additional staff that they need.

In short, this is a district that believes in accountability and can envision how a good system would work, but feels that it does not have the capacity to develop and implement one.

Particular Challenges Presented by the Public Schools Accountability Act

As noted previously, many districts voiced concerns about the constantly changing nature of state accountability policies and legislation. In fact, on the survey question about whether state and federal expectations/requirements with regard to accountability were fair and reasonable, several districts declined to make a judgment on the grounds that the expectations/requirements were too much in flux to say:

> *We need more clarification (program advisories) of new legislation before making a determination in this area. There is such short turnaround time!*

> *They [state expectations] are changing constantly. Have to wait till the smoke clears.*

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I'm not sure at this time—too many bills just passed.

They are changing as I write—which expectation?

One major change to which these districts may have been referring was the PSAA. As discussed in Chapter 5, most districts' overall reactions to the PSAA were quite positive. Many did, however, have concerns about the details of implementation. Some of these concerns (e.g., about the role of the SAT-9, rewards and sanctions, and equity) have been discussed in previous chapters. Other concerns are discussed below.

- **Many districts' concerns about the PSAA are logistical in nature, dealing with the time and resources needed to implement the new policy—especially in conjunction with other requirements.**

As discussed earlier in this chapter, many districts are critical of the short timelines and limited resources with which they have to make major accountability-related changes. These concerns apply equally to the new PSAA accountability system. District administrators who were interviewed suggested that not enough time and resources are available, either at the state or local level, to respond adequately to this latest state initiative.

In fact, the new system was perceived as *compounding* extant logistical problems, because it appears to some districts as "one more thing" to implement on top of every other requirement they must meet or initiative they are responding to, such as class-size reduction. Representative survey comments about this included:

The difficulty centers around so much "coming down" all at once, with current employees left to facilitate all of the implementation.

It is not feasible to reach achievement goals without help with facilities, professional development, technology, and extended learning time. We do not have space to even offer 20:1 at all eligible grades.

I am concerned [about the pace at which] new legislation is being introduced and implemented. As an educator I feel I'm getting set up for failure.

Theoretically, it is sound and necessary. Timelines are unrealistic and the financial support is not there (i.e., increased need for extensive staff development while at the same time SBCP days were eliminated).

Most educators feel this new system could be beneficial if there is follow-through as advertised. Having one accountability/assessment package that is coordinated is much preferable to a piecemeal approach. We are concerned that the popularity of this hot initiative

(assessment/accountability) will result in a flurry of sometimes conflicting expectations…not supported with resources, and nothing else has gone away, so it has added another layer of tasks. We need help if we are going to thoughtfully and successfully implement these demands.

It seems to be coming down to the local level at a fast and furious pace. It is difficult to thoughtfully implement new policies and programs and accountability measures given quick turnaround time.

State expectations for full implementation are unreasonable given the limited time for preparation.

The concern we have is the short timeframe for implementation of some of the state initiatives. Class size reduction would be a good example.

Teachers, administrators, and board members feel overwhelmed. Too much is coming down for us to catch our breath and do what needs to be done.

- **Several districts voiced concerns about the level of coordination between the PSAA and other initiatives, policies, and requirements.**

As is suggested by several of comments above, a number of districts are also concerned about the level of coordination (or lack thereof) among the new accountability legislation, other state legislation and policies, federal requirements, and districts' own existing policies. Additional comments from the survey along these lines included the following:

We are in the process of sorting through SB1X [the PSAA], SB2X, AB1626, and AB1639 to determine counter supports and conflicts. We are attempting to modify our programs in a coordinated manner using all new legislation.

State legislation must align with federal regulations. Schools are getting mixed messages on expectations.

Restrictive state legislation results in a loss of local control. Concern—our ability to meet the federal requirements for showing impact of Title I students.

There needs to be better coordination between the state and local districts before the mandates are put into effect.

The concern is that there are too many different accountability systems (Stull Bill, Title I, District, etc.). There has to be a way to meld them all together.

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- **Districts would like time and resources to see what strategies might help to remedy problems identified by accountability measures.**

A number of district survey comments referred to the need for time to figure out what works and what does not, and the importance of using such research to drive policy at both district and state levels:

> *We are dying under the paperwork, unfunded mandates, and changes made with no planning or direction. We need an implementation-evaluation period to find out what works—not more mandates.*
>
> *SB1X [the PSAA]—should not expect to be implemented for 2 years—need to gather reliable data for ranking—only SAT-9 currently available.*
>
> *The state needs a "master plan" to help guide the school accountability process. State legislation is coming faster than districts can implement and assess the outcomes.*
>
> *Legislation is feasible but need time and resources to implement. Also need consistency of policies based on educational research.*
>
> *Districts need time to gear up, implement, and evaluate progress toward accountability.*
>
> *High stakes pressure—asking for too much in too short a time period. If this is what we are to do then "hold the same target" for 5 years and then assess results.*

- **Districts will make a good faith effort to abide by the new accountability system.**

Despite their concerns, many districts seemed resigned to the new accountability system and indicated that they would "do their best" to implement it. One Director of Research and Evaluation who was interviewed, for example, commented that his district's policy is essentially to make itself compatible with State requirements. He said it was counterproductive to object or argue with decrees, so the district would just have to "get with the program." He said that "we take what we're given and make the best of it." Several survey respondents made similar remarks:

> *We'll implement but will find it challenging given all the other mandates.*
>
> *It is my belief that when we're discussing mandated state legislation, there is no option but to implement.*
>
> *We will do the best we can.*

As always, we will honestly attempt to implement the policies in spirit and intent. There are sure to be pitfalls and as-yet-unanticipated issues.

Of course we'll do what needs to be done but the major question is: "Does all this really improve student learning?"

The question raised by this last comment, "Does all this really improve student learning?" is a question that others have as well. A few survey respondents expressed skepticism that any of these changes are of tested, proven educational value. As one person put it, "As with so many past reform efforts, there is great haste at the start, but ultimately few appreciable results." Another respondent said, "In all honesty, more hurdles for districts with limited personnel and resources to jump through, especially when there is no proof or evidence that change will affect schools and students in a positive way." Nevertheless, as indicated by the comments presented in Chapter 5, many survey respondents did express optimism—albeit cautious optimism—about the potential effects of the PSAA.

What Would Help Districts in Implementing Accountability Systems?

- **Districts are eager for more accountability-related professional development in areas such as developing assessments and aligning curriculum with standards.**

When asked, "Would you or others from your district like to have an opportunity for more professional development related to standards-based accountability?" over 80 percent of survey respondents answered in the affirmative. In addressing the follow-up question, "What would be most helpful?," many districts provided additional written comments about the need for more professional development and in-service. The types of professional development desired were quite varied; some themes, however, did emerge from the responses.

Many districts, for example, said that they would like more professional development in developing reliable and valid assessments or in combining multiple measures. Districts also seek assistance in aligning assessments (and multiple measures in general), standards, and curriculum and instruction. Professional development requests along these lines included:

Assistance in aligning curriculum to standards, designing cumulative and summative assessments, and selecting appropriate curriculum to fill the gaps would be most helpful.

More information on criterion-referenced tests—what's available? What's reliable and valid? How can tests be used to improve instruction?

1) Research-based teaching strategies to implement standards; 2) Student performance tasks and rubrics to measure the accomplishment of each standard.

Alignments of curriculum to standards to assessment.

Developing assessment systems aligned to standards. Fair ways of combining multiple measures.

Practical use of standards in teacher planning.

Moving towards standards-based teaching and assessment, how to use standards in the classroom, how to report to parents in a standards-based system.

Aligning assessments; using assessments to guide instruction.

How to most effectively implement standards-based accountability in the individual classroom.

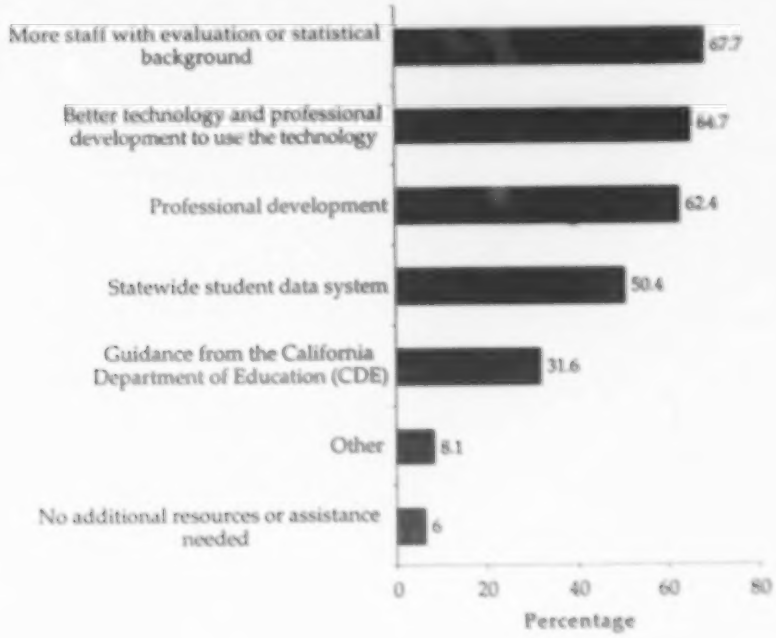
Criterion-Referenced Test development, standards-based report card, reliability and validity measures, promising practices.

- **Many districts seek additional assistance in analyzing and using student assessment data.**

Another frequently mentioned area for additional professional development and other assistance was data collection, data management, and data analysis. Responses to the question, "What additional resources would best help your district to analyze student assessment data?" are shown in Figure 11.3. Adding technical staff and updating technology led the list: 67.7 percent of respondents checked "more staff with evaluation or statistical background," and 64.7 percent checked "better technology and professional development to use the technology." In addition, 62.4 percent checked "professional development," and 50.4 percent checked "statewide student data system." The latter was also high on the wish list of at least one large district that was visited, according to the district's Assistant to the Superintendent.

Figure 11.3

District Reporting of Desired Additional Resources to Help Analyze Student Assessment Data
(N = 133)



Moreover, the phrases "analyzing data" and "data analysis" appeared again and again in districts' written survey comments about what types of professional development they would find helpful. Some of districts' data-related requests were technical in nature, relating to systems for data management, statistical expertise, etc., such as:

> *Technical capacity for analyzing student assessment data.*
>
> *Our assessment people average NPRs and all other kinds of inaccurate interpretation of data. This area needs major help.*
>
> *Technology (equip. & software) and technical support to set up adequate data base and reporting system for a standards-based results-driven focus.*
>
> *A statewide system for data management.*

How to use technology to enhance implementation of SB Accountability System—"a program for data use and analysis."

Districts not only seek assistance in collecting and analyzing data, but also in learning how to *use* data to improve instruction, as shown by the following survey comments:

(1) Use of data for program improvement. (2) Increasing skills in data analysis. (3) Ways to encourage/support teachers' thoughtful use of data.

Staff development on a standards-based system, and on using student achievement data for teachers.

Analyzing SAT-9 data to plan student/program changes—establish goals—implementing changes.

Using data to improve school and student performance; identifying and selecting instructional and school improvement strategies based on the results of data analysis.

However, it appears that districts do get some support in the analysis of data from various agencies and organizations. Sixty-four percent of districts rated the support they had received in "analyzing assessment and other data" as good or very good. Outside consultants/organizations, county offices of education, and particular people were cited by the most districts as being particularly helpful in this area.

- **Improvement of school and student performance and "putting the pieces together" are other areas in which districts requested assistance, perhaps through networking with other districts.**

As suggested by some of the comments about using data to improve performance, school and student improvement is another major area for which many districts would like professional development. As with "analyzing data," phrases such as "improving school performance" and "ways to improve student performance" came up over and over again in written survey comments. In particular, districts are looking for concrete, specific, proven strategies, especially ones to use with low-performing schools and students:

School improvement issues and strategies; support and communications/information for staff and parents of low/non-performing schools.

More workshops highlighting best practices.

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High quality intervention strategies for students behind in achievement; better strategies to teach higher level math to poorly prepared students from 8th grade; better understanding of cultural components of underachievement among Hispanics and Blacks.

SOLID RESEARCH ON WHAT REALLY WORKS for improvement.

How to implement true schoolwide reform in a district with very high transiency and poverty.

Interventions—contacts at schools with similar demographics but higher student performance.

As with this last comment, some people suggested that more opportunities to learn about the systems and strategies implemented by other districts and states would be helpful:

Models of systems employed by districts of a similar size and with limited district office staff.

High-stakes accountability state systems and results for the past 3 years from states such as Texas, Tennessee, Kentucky, etc. Also, district systems and how data are handled from collection to reporting and action plan development.

Increased networking, partnerships, consortia across districts and counties.

Putting-all-the-pieces-together ideas from successful systems.

Indeed, "putting all the pieces together" seemed to be another potential area for assistance to districts, as several survey comments mentioned. In an interview, an administrator from a district that is usually considered advanced in terms of accountability also emphasized the importance of a coordinated, integrated system. When asked what advice she had for other districts, one thing she mentioned was to "think about all the pieces and how they fit together, rather than rushing in with a piecemeal approach."

- **Predictably, districts request increased resources—funding and time—to implement accountability systems and accountability-related changes.**

In responding to the question of what types of support would help districts overcome some of the obstacles they had identified, many survey respondents, predictably, mentioned increased funding. For example:

Additional funding to support the huge demands that have been added.

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Dollars! We have strong capacity within the district and county but need money to stipend professional time. You know, like real professionals do…

Additional funding to hire staff to do assessments, prepare reports, and assist schools with accountability.

Adequate state funds to increase teacher salaries to draw more qualified people into the profession.

The California governor and legislature need to ensure that all districts and schools receive the level of educational resources required to support the academic success of all students. Accountability is essential, but by itself will not bring about desired student outcomes.

Money for quality staff development [would be helpful].[8]

Some respondents forcefully expressed views that the number of accountability-related mandates should be reduced:

Limit initiatives; give districts time to implement new laws in a timely manner.

Reduced number of reports…(e.g., Con App, Part 2 has expanded exponentially in last two years, but still must be completed by one person in this district and in the same time frame of about six weeks; this is at least the fourth survey we have completed for a government agency since January; we are currently working on both CCR self study and WASC review, while we are administering STAR testing and preparing for Gold State exams… Need we go on?)

Time. We have a curriculum alignment process in place, but are constantly being bombarded with new initiatives, regulations, etc. Many of these legislative changes come with unrealistic timeframes and arrive at the district level with muddled directions for implementation.

- **Districts also want more stability and consistency in state policy.**

Stability, consistency, and clarity from the state and from the federal government were also the subject of many district requests on the survey:

To have the state settle down and not try to implement any more pieces to the standards movement. We're headed in the right direction—let us reach consensus and implement the requirements thus far.

[8] In keeping with this comment, some districts commented negatively in various places throughout the questionnaire on the loss of state-sponsored staff development days.

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State and Fed call a moratorium on changes until they've tested them and examined the problems.

Clear direction from state that doesn't continue to change. We set systems in place that need to be redone each year with changing requirements.

Leave policies, expectations in place for a 5+ year period so what we learn can be used. Do not keep changing targets.

We [the state] need to institutionalize a process instead of changing every year.

Better coordination between USDOE, CDE, and state government.

Finally, as implied by some of the above comments, a few survey respondents did discuss some of the "political" factors that have affected educational decision-making at the state level. One person identified "truly informed legislature" as being something that would be helpful. Somewhat similarly, another complaint was, "Selected 'experts' and politicians are running the show and the involvement of practitioners is minimal. Hearings are not productive because minds are already made up." Another respondent requested, "Resolve adversarial relationship between gov, SBE, CDE! Education by legislation is making us crazy!"

In the Next Chapter

As this chapter has shown, districts face many serious challenges in their implementation of standards-based accountability. The next chapter presents recommendations for improving accountability in ways that will help districts and schools enhance the achievement of California's children.

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Chapter 12

Recommendations and Conclusions

Highlights of Recommendations

- **Overarching recommendation: Political leaders and educators need to step back, review where the California educational system is, align what already exists, and resist the temptation to move forward with new initiatives.**

- **Recommendations on coherence and communication for accountability:**
  1. **Alignment Inventory**
     An outside independent group should conduct a periodic "alignment inventory" of current state education policies.
  2. **Accountability Evaluation**
     The Governor and the Legislature should adequately fund the evaluation currently mandated by the PSAA in order to provide a comprehensive, rigorous look at the effects of the new accountability program.
  3. **Use of the World Wide Web**
     CDE and the State Board should continue to ramp up their use of the World Wide Web in communicating accountability policy to all stakeholders within the system, from district personnel to teachers to parents to the general public.

- **Recommendations on assessment for accountability:**
  4. **Standards-Based Assessments**
     If content and performance standards are to be the drivers of the accountability system, standards-based assessments must be developed as quickly and carefully as possible.
  5. **Inclusion of Standards-Based Assessments in the Academic Performance Index**
     As soon as valid and reliable standards-based assessments are available, the Academic Performance Index (API) should include them.
  6. **Statewide Student Information System**
     The Governor and the Legislature should expedite and fully fund the development of the California School Information Services (CSIS) to facilitate the inclusion of reliable comprehensive measures, such as attendance and graduation rates, in the API.

(continues)

Highlights of Recommendations — continued

- **Recommendations on capacity building for accountability:**
  7. **Professional Development for Teachers in Content Standards**
     Local school districts should ensure that professional development programs are aimed at building teacher knowledge and skills related to content standards.
  8. **Capacity Building for Accountability-Related Data Analysis**
     The Governor and the Legislature should fund capacity-building opportunities for teachers and administrators to learn about analyzing data to improve student achievement and school performance.
  9. **Clearinghouse of Exemplary Practices**
     The Governor and the Legislature should fund the development of a Clearinghouse of exemplary accountability practices developed by districts and schools for raising student achievement.
  10. **Inclusion of Accountability-Related Topics in Teacher Preparation Programs**
      The California State University and University of California teacher preparation programs should specifically address issues related to accountability.

The findings presented in this report indicate a high degree of buy-in and commitment to the concept of accountability up and down the educational ladder in California. District administrators, principals, and teachers know and accept the need to be accountable for improving student achievement, although they acknowledge that such a transition will be difficult. As one interviewed district official put it:

> *If we really believe we are a profession that can deliver the goods on student achievement, then we should be willing to accept rewards for success and consequences for failure. We should adopt a 'no excuses' philosophy. That will be difficult for a profession that has survived on excuses. We must be willing to accept responsibility regardless of the background of our students.*

Moreover, the findings suggest that even in its early stages, standards-based accountability has strengthened the focus on student achievement, led to some improvement in curriculum and instructional practice, and enhanced the correspondence between curriculum and assessment — all of which are important components of efforts to improve student achievement. Overall, there is a sense of optimism about accountability's potential impact.

However, this optimism is a cautious one; despite the widespread support for the notion of accountability, many districts have experienced considerable frustration over various aspects of the implementation of a standards-based accountability system. In addition, while many of the essential pieces of a strong accountability system exist, they need to be tied together in a coherent, cohesive manner. This chapter discusses some of the ways in which the state accountability system could be strengthened to facilitate achievement of the ultimate goal — improved student performance.

Making the System More Coherent and Clearly Communicated at All Levels

- **For accountability to be effective, it must be systemic and coherent in nature. It is not enough for individual pieces of accountability to be present — they must reinforce and align with one another. Much more work is needed in California before such an accountability system is complete and leads to improved student performance in a way that is consistent with state academic standards.**

The full-blown accountability system described by the study's conceptual framework (see Chapter 3) requires a high degree of clarity and coordination of a large number of important components. All components are interrelated, reinforce each other, and are essential if accountability is to work. Only when they work in concert do they form a complete accountability system that is geared toward one end: improving student performance according to the state's expectations of what students should know and be able to do.

To have such an effect, state content standards must be aligned with local standards, which must in turn be aligned with performance standards. Curriculum frameworks, assessments, instructional materials, professional development, and even teacher preparation programs all must be consistent with the standards. These and other components must be appropriately aligned throughout the system — all the way from the policymakers in Sacramento to each classroom teacher. In California, however, many of these elements have not as yet been fully developed, nor are they coordinated with one another. Furthermore, the loose coupling between state policy and local implementation by teachers poses a significant challenge to the effectiveness of the accountability system.

- **Clear communication and consistent messages about accountability at all levels of the educational system — from the state to the district to the school to the classroom — would increase the positive impact of accountability on student performance.**

Critical to making the system more coherent at all levels is clear communication. The public and those at the local level would benefit from a clearer understanding of what accountability *is*, how it is supposed to work, what its components are, and how the components are interrelated. In particular, clear communications about what is expected must reach the level of the classroom for accountability to help raise student achievement.

Study findings, however, suggest that communication about accountability becomes increasingly diluted (or even worse, becomes increasingly muddied) from the pinnacle of the system (the state) to the foundation of the system (the classroom). In addition, very few districts appear to have a consistent local vision of accountability. In many cases, districts' notions of accountability had not filtered much beyond district staff. Principals often had different notions of what accountability required, and teachers either had no awareness or a different concept of the accountability process.

This disjuncture occurred not only vertically within the communication chain, i.e. between district personnel, the school principal, and teachers, but often horizontally, within the same schools. The end result of all this static in the system is that teachers, who bear the most responsibility for day-to-day implementation of accountability policies, are not getting the information they need. Or the information they receive about new policies appears contradictory to the purpose of existing reforms that they are still required to implement.

For example, local standards adopted at the encouragement of the state were subsequently supplanted by state-adopted standards a year later. Locally determined methods for combining multiple assessment measures that were mandated by the state one year were subjected to new state guidelines the following year. The standards-based accountability system that relied on multiple measures survived only one year before being superseded by the Academic Performance Index — an indicator currently based on a single norm-referenced test, the SAT-9, not as yet aligned with state content standards.

In short, those closest to the learners, teachers, need to *understand* the purpose and how to implement new policies. At the same time, they must have some degree of *confidence* that those at the top are carefully weighing and considering how well all these different policies work in tandem at the classroom level to improve standards-based student performance.

- **Greater stability in policy at the state level would facilitate the implementation of accountability at the local level. If policy changes are necessary, they should be based on evidence collected from those who are most affected, namely local administrators, educators, and students.**

In an analysis of why North Carolina and Texas have shown the greatest sustained gains in student achievement this decade, Grissmer and Flanagan (1998) find that a central reason is

that both these states have maintained consistent, stable reform policies over time. California, on the other hand, has frequently changed direction, adopting one reform after the next without allowing sufficient time to fully implement or evaluate any — much to the frustration of district personnel.

As countless others have pointed out, education in California would benefit from the uniting of its current splintered accountability efforts; policy directives currently stem from the California Department of Education, the Governor's office, the Legislature, and the State Board of Education. There needs to be a systematic review of existing policies and practices that have implications for accountability, and redundant and conflicting policies and procedures should be streamlined or eliminated. If California is to have an accountability system that enhances student achievement in the right direction, it must continue to strive for a standards-based, stable, and consistent approach, and send clear signals to districts and schools.

For the most part, California should "stay the course" with developing the existing components of its accountability infrastructure: standards, assessment, and a system of interventions, rewards, and sanctions. However, no approach is perfect from the start. Modifications may be necessary to rectify unintended consequences and ensure the system is meeting its primary objective. The caveat is that *any changes should be well-informed by systematically collected evidence from the local level* about what is working or not working and why.

Recommendations on Coherence and Communication for Accountability

1. Alignment Inventory

An outside independent group should conduct a periodic "alignment inventory" of current state education policies.

On a regular basis, although not necessarily annually, an outside independent group should examine the status of development and the degree of coherence among the several legislatively-mandated components of the current accountability system. This review would include a *horizontal* analysis of key state policies, such as PSAA (SB X1), STAR (AB 265), High School Exit Exam (SB X2), and the various other state curriculum and instruction and professional development initiatives. A *vertical* analysis, examining how well such policies are communicated and implemented from the state, to districts, to schools, to the classroom level should also be part of this inventory. Such an inventory should be informed through a combination of sources, including testimonials

at public hearings and evaluation data. The appointment of the outside body should be one of the first charges to the Accountability unit within CDE. The independent group should report its findings on an ongoing, regular basis to CDE and to the State Board of Education, the Legislature, and the Governor.

2. Accountability Evaluation

The Governor and the Legislature should adequately fund the evaluation currently mandated by the PSAA in order to provide a comprehensive, rigorous look at the effects of the new accountability program.

The evaluation of the PSAA would serve as an important source of information on how well accountability policies are understood, implemented, and used to facilitate change in classroom teaching and to improve student outcomes in directions that are desirable. Adequately funded, the evaluation could help ensure the availability of rigorous and generalizable information to inform policymakers about any modifications necessary to the existing accountability system. The evaluation should pay close attention to matters of equity, such as the impact of the accountability system on student subgroup populations and on schools in a wide range of settings.

3. Use of the World Wide Web

CDE and the State Board should continue to ramp up their use of the World Wide Web in communicating accountability policy to all stakeholders within the system, from district personnel to teachers to parents to the general public.

Since the enactment of the PSAA, the Web has served as an invaluable communication resource. Further development and resources should be spent on updating and making more comprehensive the PSAA and STAR portions of the CDE Web site. The "alignment inventory" could also be housed on the CDE Web site as a way of providing local districts and educators with the "big picture" perspective on the status, interrelationship, and alignment of various components of the state's accountability, assessment, and standards policies. In addition, some state and district resources should be focused on ensuring that teachers are familiar with the Web site, have easy access to it, and use it routinely.

The Direction of Assessment Needs Immediate Attention

- **Assessments for accountability purposes should measure student progress toward content standards; if they do not, they will divert attention *away* from content standards.**

Ideally, in a completely articulated standards-based accountability system, schools should focus on teaching curriculum based on content standards, and assessments should merely be a measure of how well students have mastered the standards. In reality, however, although many districts believe in their adopted content standards and want to be able to teach to them, their focus has moved to "teaching to the test" — specifically the state-mandated SAT-9 — rather than on teaching to the standards. The findings of this evaluation clearly demonstrate that, as a mandatory, high-stakes test, the SAT-9 exerts considerable influence at the school and classroom level, often driving curriculum and instruction practices to a much greater extent than the content standards *per se*.

This is not surprising, given the state's emphasis on assessment. And were the SAT-9 fully aligned with the content standards, the emphasis on the test might help bring about the desired effect of student mastery of the standards. Yet there are serious concerns about the extent to which the SAT-9, even with its augmented sections, is aligned with the standards. Thus, as a measure of student progress toward mastery of standards, this instrument, at least in its current form, is incomplete. Even should scores on the SAT-9 rise significantly over the next few years, an important question would be whether the rise is truly indicative of the type of student improvement desired.

A standards-based accountability system must, by definition, be driven by content standards. Assessments for accountability purposes should be considered only as a means of ensuring that the content standards are the focus of instruction, and they can only do so if they are aligned with the content standards.

Recommendations on Assessment for Accountability

4. Standards-Based Assessments

If content and performance standards are to be the drivers of the accountability system, standards-based assessments must be developed as quickly and carefully as possible.

It is essential that assessments used for accountability purposes, whether the augmented SAT-9 or a matrix test, reflect the state standards. The Governor and the Legislature should provide adequate resources to develop such standards-based assessments as quickly as possible without jeopardizing their validity and reliability. The development of the standards-based assessments should include the input of educators, and, when completed, the assessments should be carefully field-tested.

5. Inclusion of Standards-Based Assessments in the Academic Performance Index

As soon as valid and reliable standards-based assessments are available, the Academic Performance Index (API) should include them.

As the development of the API proceeds, the addition of other valid and reliable measures will help ensure that schools are not being ranked based only on one, narrow indicator of performance — at present, the basic-skills test items of the SAT-9. As with other accountability components, the critical variable is resources; to do this quickly without compromising quality will be expensive. Cutting corners to limit the amount of money spent or extending the timeline risks having a state accountability system that is driven by an indicator of performance that is not consistent with state standards or a comprehensive definition of school performance.

6. Statewide Student Information System

The Governor and the Legislature should expedite and fully fund the development of the California School Information Services (CSIS) to facilitate the inclusion of reliable comprehensive measures, such as attendance and graduation rates, in the API.

Such a statewide student information system would benefit all districts, but smaller districts in particular, by providing the infrastructure necessary to collect reliable data on attendance and graduation rates, to track students who change schools, and so on. Although expensive initially, it is likely that a statewide data system would actually be more cost-effective than the current approach, in which individual districts struggle to design their own systems. In the short term, as the system is being developed, the state should provide additional support, such as an optional data service funded through a combination of state and local contributions, to small and medium-sized districts.

Capacity-Building is Critical to the Overall Success of Accountability

- **Accountability measures should be accompanied by capacity-building activities, such as professional development for teachers on teaching to content standards and for teachers and administrators on using data to improve instruction.**

While a set of strong, standards-aligned assessments would go a long way toward improving instruction and student performance in the desired directions, they would be bolstered by additional capacity-building activities, such as the provision of substantive professional development opportunities. In order to successfully implement accountability, both principals and teachers need to understand how to teach to content standards and how to use assessment data to inform classroom practices. These skills are not traditionally taught in teacher certification programs, so many teachers and principals are forced to acquire them on the fly or not at all.

As reported in Chapter 6, a number of teachers are either unaware of district content standards or have not actively revised their teaching to incorporate them. Therefore, it is clear that extensive professional development on using content standards is necessary. While most districts do offer some professional development on content standards, the current offerings appear limited. For instance, the evaluation found that roughly 75 percent of surveyed districts require less than three days of professional development related to content standards in a given year, and about 20 percent require *less than one day*. For some teachers, incorporating content standards will necessitate a profound change in teaching. A day, or even three days, will not be sufficient to effect such an important transition. Current state-level efforts to link professional development to content standards are clearly needed, and their continued existence should be encouraged. Additional support and resources for this professional development would be invaluable in moving California toward high standards for all students.

In addition to knowledge and skills about aligning instruction with content standards, teachers also need appropriate tools and resources for their efforts to be successful. In particular, they need curriculum materials that are aligned with the content standards. Again, the importance of a system in which multiple components — content standards, professional development, assessment, and curriculum materials — are aligned in a coherent and cohesive fashion cannot be emphasized enough.

Another area requiring significant capacity-building attention is the analysis and use of data. (See Chapters 8 and 11.) Professional development around the use of data for people at every level of the system — district administrators, school administrators, and teachers — is necessary for accountability to have its maximal impact. Many district officials report that

they are not confident that their teachers or principals have the skills to use data, and many commented on a lack of resources (such as a statewide student data system) as well. The use of test results to modify instructional practices is rarely taught in great detail in current teacher and administrator certification programs, and existing professional development opportunities, again, appear limited. The use of data to improve instruction — and ultimately improve student achievement — is a resource of tremendous potential value that, as yet, has largely been untapped.

These issues will only become more prominent as the PSAA takes hold. In particular, the new, complex formulas used for the API will require unprecedented levels of understanding among multiple stakeholders if they are appropriately to employ the formulas and interpret their implications. Moreover, the implications of using test results to determine rewards and sanctions must be fully understood by state-, district-, and school-level personnel, as well as by the public.

Putting into place a high-stakes accountability system is an immensely complex process requiring sophisticated knowledge, skills, and resources at both the state and local levels. Moving from the state of knowledge and skills that now exists will require added emphasis on professional development and other capacity-building tools and resources, such as technical assistance and other forms of support.

Recommendations on Capacity Building for Accountability

7. Professional Development for Teachers in Content Standards

Local school districts should ensure that professional development programs are aimed at building teacher knowledge and skills related to content standards.

These programs should be adequately funded and sustained over time; district priorities for professional development might need to be examined. In addition, the Governor and the Legislature should ensure that existing professional development programs aimed at building teacher knowledge and skills around content standards are adequately funded. Finally, teachers must have adequate time to participate in these opportunities. Accountability will become an empty shell if teachers are unaware of how to use in their teaching the content standards that underlie it.

8. Capacity Building for Accountability-Related Data Analysis

The Governor and the Legislature should fund capacity-building opportunities for teachers and administrators to learn about analyzing data to improve student achievement and school performance.

CDE should serve as a broker for these services and provide statewide uniformity and quality control for them (which is mandatory for these efforts). The county offices and superintendents should serve as regional resources for this training.

9. Clearinghouse of Exemplary Practices

The Governor and the Legislature should fund the development of a Clearinghouse of exemplary accountability practices developed by districts and schools for raising student achievement.

The Clearinghouse, which would be accessible through the Web, would feature information about practices from districts that have shown a successful grasp of implementing accountability at the local level. Through the Clearinghouse, districts and schools would be able to find out about "best practices" that were successful in settings and with student populations similar to their own.

10. Inclusion of Accountability-Related Topics in Teacher Preparation Programs

The California State University and University of California teacher preparation programs should specifically address issues related to accountability.

These issues include teaching to content standards and using data from accountability mechanisms to improve instruction.

Conclusion

At its current stage of development, the concept of standards-based accountability enjoys considerable support in California as a reform strategy. However, the sense of optimism about its effectiveness is jarred by the reality of implementation. Accountability has proven to be a complicated task and that complexity is exacerbated by the compressed time frame in which it has been implemented. As one district Superintendent put it, "We are training for a marathon and asked to do 100-yard sprints!" The early timing of this evaluation in the long-term development process cannot be emphasized enough. It will be several years before a fully developed accountability system can be expected to have widespread, positive impact.

The recommendations generated from this evaluation are few in number, but all are important. They have implications and responsibilities for all the actors in education in California: the State Board of Education, the Governor, the Legislature, local districts, county offices of education, Superintendents, and the CSU and UC teacher education programs. Some of the activities mentioned in the recommendations are already underway, but accountability brings a heightened emphasis to them.

The overarching recommendation from this report is the following:

Step Back, Review, and Align

Political leaders and educators need to step back, review where the California educational system is, align what already exists, and resist the temptation to move forward with new initiatives.

The authors of this report believe that attention to the issues raised by this evaluation will help bring about a coherent, cohesive accountability system that can help improve the achievement of all of California's children.

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District Accountability Survey

March 1999

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District Accountability Survey

This questionnaire is part of an evaluation being conducted for the California Department of Education by WestEd in collaboration with Management Analysis and Planning, Inc. (MAP). The purpose of the evaluation is to examine the processes and impact of California's Standards-Based Accountability System in school districts statewide and the relationship of this system to school district efforts to improve student performance. Two hundred districts are being surveyed as part of this study.

About this Questionnaire

This questionnaire contains the following sections:

I. Local Accountability System Features
II. Content Standards
III. Student Assessment Measures
IV. Analysis and Use of Data
V. Review of School Performance
VI. Helps and Hindrances

We recognize that more than one person from each district may need to be involved in filling out the questionnaire, and we encourage such collaboration. We also welcome further written comments in any section or on any item of the questionnaire. It is important that all districts receiving this questionnaire participate in the survey so that the results will fairly represent districts across the state. **Please fold the completed questionnaire and return it in the enclosed postage-paid envelope as soon as possible.**

YOUR RESPONSES WILL BE KEPT STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL. No information identifying individual districts or survey respondents will be reported under any circumstances. Please remove the name label on the front cover before returning the completed questionnaire.

Thank you for contributing your time and thoughtful responses to this study.

For Further Information

If you have any questions about this questionnaire or about the study in general, please feel free to contact us:

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District Accountability Survey

This survey asks you questions about your district "accountability system." For the purposes of this study, "accountability system" is meant to encompass a broad range of practices in districts. We welcome further written comments on any questionnaire item; please feel free to use the back cover if necessary.

SECTION I. Local Accountability System Features

1. Does your district have what you consider to be a **standards-based accountability system**?

   ❒ Yes ❒ No ❒ In development

2. Listed below are a number of possible **components of local accountability systems**. Indicate the level of implementation in your district of each component. *(Circle one number on each line.)*

	Not implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented for less than 2 years	Fully implemented for more than 2 years	Don't know
a. Grade-level content standards in English/language arts and mathematics	1	2	3	4	9
b. Use of multiple assessment measures to determine whether students meet grade-level standards	1	2	3	4	9
c. Alignment of assessments with district content standards	1	2	3	4	9
d. Periodic reviews of school performance	1	2	3	4	9
e. District intervention strategies for low-performing schools	1	2	3	4	9
f. District rewards or incentives for high-performing or improving schools	1	2	3	4	9
g. Incentives for students to maximize performance (e.g., requirements for promotion or graduation)	1	2	3	4	9

3. **Who has been involved** in developing your district's accountability system? *(Check all that apply.)*

   ❒ District superintendent
   ❒ District accountability and/or assessment director(s)
   ❒ Other district personnel
   ❒ Principals and other school administrators
   ❒ Teachers
   ❒ Parents
   ❒ Students
   ❒ School board members
   ❒ Business/community members
   ❒ Higher education faculty
   ❒ Professional consultants
   ❒ Other: _____

4. Rate the extent to which, **in your opinion**, the accountability system or particular accountability components have **affected** each of the following in the district as a whole. *(Circle one number on each line.)*

		Too early to expect effect	Negative effect	No effect	Some positive effect	Significant positive effect
a.	Standardized test scores	0	1	2	3	4
b.	Student achievement on other measures of academic performance	0	1	2	3	4
c.	Student attendance rates	0	1	2	3	4
d.	Drop-out rates	0	1	2	3	4
e.	Teacher morale	0	1	2	3	4
f.	School climate	0	1	2	3	4
g.	Parent/community satisfaction	0	1	2	3	4
h.	Parent involvement	0	1	2	3	4
i.	District-level curriculum and instruction policies	0	1	2	3	4
j.	District-level assessments	0	1	2	3	4
k.	Curriculum and instruction practices in schools	0	1	2	3	4
l.	Classroom assessments	0	1	2	3	4
m.	Other: _____	0	1	2	3	4

5. For any items in the previous question for which you indicated an effect (positive or negative), please **elaborate on the role played by the accountability system** or particular accountability components.

_____

_____

_____

6. In your district, how do **Title I schools compare with non-Title I schools** in the degree of implementation of the accountability system or particular accountability components?

_____

_____

_____

7. What is your opinion of the **pending state legislation** related to school accountability? (Discuss the feasibility of implementation in your district, interaction with other legislation or policies, etc.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

SECTION II. Content Standards

		English/language arts content standards	Mathematics content standards
8.	*Has your district developed or adopted* ***grade-level content standards***[1] for what every student in the district should know and be able to do in English/language arts (column 1) and in mathematics (column 2)? *(Circle one number in the English column and one in the mathematics column.)*		
	Yes	1	1
	No	2	2
	In development	3	3
	Different district schools use different content standards	4	4
	Other: _____	5	5
	Note: if you answered "no" for either English/language arts or mathematics, skip the remaining questions in this section for that content area.		
9.	What is the **basis** for your district content standards? *(Circle all that apply in each column.)*		
	State standards (1998)[2]	1	1
	Earlier state documents (specify: _____)	2	2
	Challenge standards	3	3
	New Standards Project standards	4	4
	NCTE/NCTM standards	5	5
	Standards developed by another district or county office	6	6
	Developed own standards from scratch	7	7
	Other: _____	8	8
10.	**Who has been involved** in developing and/or adopting the content standards in your district? *(Circle all that apply in each column.)*		
	District accountability and/or assessment director(s)	1	1
	Curriculum specialists	2	2
	Other district or school administrators	3	3
	Teachers	4	4
	Parents	5	5
	Students	6	6
	School board members	7	7
	Business/community members	8	8
	Higher education faculty	9	9
	Other: _____	10	10
11.	**In what year** were the district content standards adopted? (If the content standards are still in development, indicate when your district anticipates their adoption.)	_____	_____

[1] "Grade-level standards" are standards for each grade taught in the district, e.g., K-12 in a unified district.
[2] The English/Language Arts and Mathematics Content Standards adopted by the State Board of Education in 1998.

		English/language arts content standards	Mathematics content standards
12.	a. For which of the following groups does your district **require professional development** related to the use of the district content standards? *(Circle all that apply in each column.)*		
	Teachers	1	1
	Principals and other school administrators	2	2
	District curriculum staff	3	3
	Other district staff	4	4
	None	5	5
	Other: _____	6	6
	b. In a given year, about how much professional development does your district **require for teachers** related to the use of the district content standards? *(Circle one number in each column.)*		
	Less than 1 day	1	1
	1 to 3 days	2	2
	More than 3 days	3	3
	Don't know	4	4
13.	Rate the extent to which district-adopted instructional materials are **aligned** with district content standards. *(Circle one number in each column.)*		
	Not at all	1	1
	To a small extent	2	2
	To a moderate extent	3	3
	To a great extent	4	4
	Don't know	5	5
14.	a. Has your district **compared** the district content standards to the state content standards (1998) for **rigor** (in terms of breadth, depth, pace of learning, levels of performance)? *(Circle one number in each column.)*		
	Yes	1	1
	No	2	2
	In the process	3	3
	Plan to do	4	4
	Not applicable: district adopted the state standards	5	5
	Don't know	6	6
	Comment: _____		
	b. If yes, how did the district content standards compare to the state standards? *(Circle one number in each column.)*		
	Less rigorous than the state standards	1	1
	As rigorous as the state standards	2	2
	More rigorous than the state standards	3	3
	Don't know	4	4
	Comment: _____		

c. Briefly **describe the process** that was or will be used in your district to compare the district standards with the state standards for rigor.

English/language arts: _____

_____

_____

Mathematics: _____

_____

_____

15. Estimate the percentage of teachers in your district whose **classroom teaching reflects** the district content standards.

English/language arts content standards: _____ % Mathematics content standards: _____ %

SECTION III. Student Assessment Measures

16. Which of the following **assessment measures** does the district use at one or more grade levels for **accountability purposes**? *(Check all that apply.)*

Norm-Referenced Tests (NRTs)

- ☐ SAT-9
- ☐ Other NRT (English)
- ☐ Primary language NRT
- ☐ Different NRTs used in different district schools
- ☐ Other: _____

Criterion-Referenced Tests (CRTs)

- ☐ District-developed English/lang. arts CRT
- ☐ District-developed mathematics CRT
- ☐ Commercial CRT
- ☐ Different CRTs used in different district schools
- ☐ Other: _____

Other Measures

- ☐ Report card grades
- ☐ Writing samples
- ☐ Teacher evaluation/judgment
- ☐ Different measures used in different district schools
- ☐ Other: _____

17. What process, if any, does the district use to ensure that **class grades are consistent and comparable** across district schools? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ District-issued grading policy or guidelines
- ☐ District provides professional development opportunities for teachers on grading
- ☐ District compares grades at different schools
- ☐ District compares student achievement on multiple assessment measures for triangulation of data
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ None at this time

18. If the district uses locally developed assessments, does the district provide any **professional development** for teachers on the **use and/or scoring** of these measures (e.g., rubrics)?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not applicable

19. Rate the extent to which district assessments (not including the SAT-9), taken as a whole, are **aligned with district content standards**. *(Circle one number on each line.)*

	Not at all	To small extent	To moderate extent	To great extent	Don't know	Not applicable
English/language arts assessments	1	2	3	4	5	6
Mathematics assessments	1	2	3	4	5	6

SECTION IV. Analysis and Use of Data

20. Rate the extent to which each of the following groups (generally speaking, throughout the district) **examines and analyzes student assessment data** for students within the relevant unit (e.g., district, school, or classroom). *(Circle one number on each line.)*

		Group has no access to the data	Not at all	To small extent	To moderate extent	To great extent	Don't know
a.	District curriculum & instruction personnel	0	1	2	3	4	9
b.	District accountability & assessment personnel	0	1	2	3	4	9
c.	Principals and other school administrators	0	1	2	3	4	9
d.	Teachers	0	1	2	3	4	9
e.	Other: _____	0	1	2	3	4	9

21. Listed below are a number of possible reasons why a **district** might collect and analyze student assessment data. Rate the extent to which **your district** currently uses student assessment data for each of these purposes. *(Circle one number on each line.)*

		District does not use data for this purpose at all	District uses data for this purpose to small extent	District uses data for this purpose to moderate extent	District uses data for this purpose to great extent
a.	To satisfy state and federal reporting requirements	1	2	3	4
b.	To design new district-wide programs for schools	1	2	3	4
c.	To improve instruction in all district schools	1	2	3	4
d.	To rate or rank district schools	1	2	3	4
e.	To identify schools that need assistance	1	2	3	4
f.	To help schools identify individual students who need assistance	1	2	3	4
g.	To identify teachers who need assistance	1	2	3	4
h.	To identify factors that influence student achievement	1	2	3	4
i.	To gauge the performance of student subgroups across district schools	1	2	3	4
j.	Other: _____	1	2	3	4

22. Listed below are a number of possible reasons why a **school** might collect and analyze student assessment data. Rate the extent to which **schools in your district** (generally speaking, among a majority of schools) use student assessment data for each of these purposes. *(Circle one number on each line.)*

		Schools do not use data for this purpose at all	Schools use data for this purpose to small extent	Schools use data for this purpose to moderate extent	Schools use data for this purpose to great extent
a.	To diagnose areas where students are in need of instructional support	1	2	3	4
b.	For placement of students (e.g., into certain courses, support services, or educational programs)	1	2	3	4
c.	For evaluation of individual students (e.g., for promotion to the next grade level or for graduation)	1	2	3	4
d.	To identify which students do not meet grade level standards	1	2	3	4
e.	To guide curriculum and instruction on an ongoing basis	1	2	3	4
f.	To identify areas for school improvement	1	2	3	4
g.	To better target school resources	1	2	3	4
h.	To gauge the performance of student subgroups within the school	1	2	3	4
i.	To identify teachers who need assistance	1	2	3	4
j.	For evaluation of individual teachers	1	2	3	4
k.	Other: _____	1	2	3	4

23. Does your district provide support or opportunities for **principals and other school administrators** to get professional development in how to analyze and use student assessment data?

❒ Yes ❒ No ❒ Don't know

24. Does your district provide support or opportunities for **teachers** to get professional development in how to analyze and use student assessment data?

❒ Yes ❒ No ❒ Don't know

25. By which of the following **categories** does your district **disaggregate student assessment data** at the district, school, and classroom levels? *(Circle all that apply on each line.)*

		Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	SES (e.g., free/ red. lunch)	Title I	LEP	Special Educ.	Gifted & Talented	Migrant status	None
a.	District level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
b.	School level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
c.	Classroom level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

26. Rate the **technical capacity** (computing, trained staff, etc.) of your district to **analyze student assessment data** at each of the following levels. *(Circle one number on each line.)*

	None	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good	Don't know
a. District level	1	2	3	4	5	9
b. School level	1	2	3	4	5	9
c. Classroom level	1	2	3	4	5	9

27. What **additional resources** would best help your district to analyze student assessment data? *(Check all that apply.)*

- ❒ Guidance from the California Department of Education (CDE)
- ❒ Statewide student data system
- ❒ Professional development
- ❒ Other: _____
- ❒ Better technology and professional development to use the technology
- ❒ More staff with evaluation or statistical background
- ❒ No additional resources or assistance needed

SECTION V. Review of School Performance

28. a. Does your district currently use an **index or formula** to rate **the performance of schools** in the district?

❒ Yes ❒ No

b. If yes, what **measures** are part of this index? *(Check all that apply.)*

- ❒ Standardized test scores
- ❒ Report card grades
- ❒ Other student academic performance measures
- ❒ Student attendance rates
- ❒ LEP redesignation rates
- ❒ Drop-out rates
- ❒ Graduation rates
- ❒ Rates of retention-in-grade
- ❒ Teacher attendance rates
- ❒ Teacher morale
- ❒ Parent/community satisfaction
- ❒ Parent involvement
- ❒ School climate
- ❒ Other: _____

29. a. What types of **performance targets**[3], if any, have been set for each of the following subsets of schools in your district? *(Circle all that apply on each line.)*

	No performance targets set	Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets[4]	District-specified performance targets (other than AYP)	Other performance targets (please specify)
a. Title I schools	0	1	2	_____
b. Non-Title I schools	0	1	2	_____
c. Other subset of schools (specify subset): _____	0	1	2	_____

[3] A performance target is a goal which a school should try to reach on a single assessment measure (e.g., standardized test scores or student attendance) or combination of measures (e.g., test scores *and* attendance) over a given period of time.
[4] Per CDE guidelines from Ruth Ann McKenna, memo, June 30, 1997

b. If you indicated any performance targets set by the district, which of the following characteristics (if any) apply to these performance targets? *(Check all that apply.)*

- ☐ Targets tailored to individual schools
- ☐ Targets rise over time
- ☐ Targets set for student subgroups (as well as for schools)
- ☐ Targets set for more than one measure or for a combination of measures (e.g., an index)
- ☐ Other: _____

30. What **policies or intervention strategies** does the district employ with schools that demonstrate low academic performance? *(Check the three that are most important.)*

- ☐ Schools are given a period of time to improve. If they do not, consequences follow.
- ☐ Schools consult with school community (e.g., teachers, parents, students).
- ☐ Schools are assisted by district-appointed experts in formulating an improvement plan and goals.
- ☐ Schools receive additional professional development opportunities.
- ☐ District officials conduct reviews of school-site personnel.
- ☐ District reconstitutes schools (particularly if schools do not improve over time).
- ☐ District tailors interventions to particular schools.
- ☐ Other: _____

31. a. Does the district offer **incentives or rewards** to individual schools for high student performance or for improving performance?

☐ Yes ☐ No

b. If yes, what forms do these incentives take? *(Check all that apply.)*

- ☐ Monetary incentives for schools
- ☐ Monetary incentives for teachers
- ☐ Recognition for teachers and/or schools
- ☐ Waivers from district policies/regulations
- ☐ Other: _____

SECTION VI. Helps and Hindrances

32. a. Have any particular state-level practices or documents **helped** your district to develop and implement its accountability system?

☐ Yes ☐ No

b. If yes, what have you found most helpful? _____

_____

_____

33. a. Have any particular state-level practices or documents **hindered** your district in developing and implementing its accountability system?

❒ Yes ❒ No

b. If yes, please discuss: _____

_____

_____

34. Rate the **communication** from the California Department of Education about state and federal **expectations/requirements of districts** in terms of each of the following. *(Circle one number on each line.)*

		Poor	Fair	Good	Very good	Don't know
a.	Developing, adopting, and implementing content standards	1	2	3	4	9
b.	Selecting and implementing student assessments	1	2	3	4	9
c.	Combining multiple measures to determine whether students meet grade level standards	1	2	3	4	9
d.	Analyzing assessment and other data	1	2	3	4	9
e.	Reporting data	1	2	3	4	9
f.	Reviewing school performance	1	2	3	4	9
g.	Improving school performance	1	2	3	4	9
h.	Improving student performance	1	2	3	4	9

35. a. Do you believe that state and federal expectations/requirements with regard to accountability and districts' roles in accountability are **fair and reasonable**?

❒ Yes ❒ No

b. If no, please comment: _____

_____

36. From whom does your district **receive assistance** in developing, implementing, and refining the district's accountability system? *(Check all that apply.)*

❒ California Department of Education (CDE)
❒ Other districts in county or state
❒ County offices of education
❒ National education organizations
❒ Test publishers
❒ Comprehensive Assistance Center(s) (CAC)
❒ Statewide System of School Support (S4)
❒ Professional consultants
❒ Universities
❒ Regional education laboratories
❒ Foundations
❒ Subject-matter projects
❒ No assistance sought
❒ Other: _____

37. Rate the **support** your district has received (e.g., from the agencies and organizations listed in the previous question) in terms of each of the following. For each item that you mark "good" or "very good," write in the agency/organization that has been most helpful. *(Circle one number on each line.)*

	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good	Don't know	Who was most helpful?
a. Developing, adopting, and implementing content standards	1	2	3	4	9	_____
b. Selecting and implementing student assessments	1	2	3	4	9	_____
c. Combining multiple measures to determine whether students meet grade level standards	1	2	3	4	9	_____
d. Analyzing assessment and other data	1	2	3	4	9	_____
e. Reporting data	1	2	3	4	9	_____
f. Reviewing school performance	1	2	3	4	9	_____
g. Improving school performance	1	2	3	4	9	_____
h. Improving student performance	1	2	3	4	9	_____

38. a. Over the past year, have **you or someone from your district** participated in any **workshops for districts** related to standards-based accountability?

❒ Yes ❒ No

b. If yes, please list the title of each workshop attended, who offered it (e.g., CDE, county office of education, etc.), and rate how helpful it was.

Workshop Title (need not be exact)	Who Offered the Workshop	Not helpful	Somewhat helpful	Very helpful
_____	_____	1	2	3
_____	_____	1	2	3

39. a. Would you or others from your district like to have an opportunity for **more professional development** related to standards-based accountability?

❒ Yes ❒ No

b. If yes, what would be most helpful? _____

_____

_____

_____

40. Listed below are a number of challenges districts might face in developing and implementing an accountability system. Circle the letters of the **top five challenges** your district faces or has faced, and then in the spaces on the right rank order them from 1 to 5 (1 = greatest challenge).

		Rank Order
a.	Reaching local consensus on content standards	_____
b.	Finding or developing reliable and valid forms of assessment	_____
c.	Implementing professional development for teachers in the use of content standards	_____
d.	Aligning curriculum, instruction, assessment, and content standards	_____
e.	Finding expertise in data analysis (at district or school level)	_____
f.	Acquiring technical support or tools for performing data analysis	_____
g.	Setting realistic performance expectations or targets for schools	_____
h.	Generating parental or public support for accountability-related changes	_____
i.	Making sure the system is equitable for all schools and population subgroups	_____
j.	Dealing with limited resources (time, staff, financial support)	_____
k.	Juggling district priorities (e.g., class-size reduction, repair of school buildings, etc.)	_____
l.	Balancing local needs with state or federal requirements	_____
m.	Understanding confusing or conflicting state or federal requirements	_____
n.	Accommodating changing state or federal requirements/policies	_____
o.	Other: _____	_____

41. What types of support, and from whom, might help your district **overcome these obstacles**?

_____

_____

42. For our records, how many people were involved in filling out this questionnaire?

❒ One person ❒ One to three people ❒ More than three people

43. For **follow-up purposes**, we may wish to contact the people who filled out this questionnaire. Please provide contact information:

Name	Title	Phone Number	E-Mail Address
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Your thoughtful responses are appreciated. Thank you for your time.

Accountability Evaluation
Interview Protocol: State Policy Makers

MAP is a private consulting firm working as a subcontractor to WestEd on a project funded by the California Department of Education.

The study I am working on is investigating the relationship between state level accountability policies and procedures and what actually happens in school districts, schools and classrooms. Today I would like to focus on the perspective of state-level policy makers.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Note: During interview, keep a running record of all relevant materials mentioned, and ask for them at the end of the interview.

Name:
Title:
Years in position:
Previous experience:

1. Describe your involvement in developing an accountability system for California public schools. What is the current status of those activities? What are the next steps?

2. What is the purpose of a state level accountability system?

3. What should drive the accountability system? (Prompts: Standards? Achievement Test Results? Multiple Measures?)

4. What are the appropriate indicators the state should use? (Prompts: Meeting specified levels of standards, improvement in performance, STAR Tests, Matrix Sample tests, etc.)

5. What is the appropriate state role in an accountability system? What role, if any, should each of the following play in an state level accountability system:
   - Governor
   - Legislature
   - State Board of Education
   - State Superintendent of Public Instruction

6. What are the appropriate state interventions, rewards, sanctions, etc. to insure that there are consequences for school performance? What are the appropriate consequences for:
   - School Districts
   - Schools
   - Principals

- Teachers
- Students
- Parents

7. What are the most likely impediments to the adoption of an accountability system? How can these impediments be removed?

8. What are the most likely impediments to the successful implementation of an accountability system? How will these impediments be removed?

9. What other state policies affect the direction and implementation of a state level accountability system? Which state policies, programs or initiatives appear to be working best at driving stronger local accountability?

10. What is the appropriate role of local stakeholders in a state accountability system?
    - District Governing Boards
    - District Superintendents
    - Principals
    - Teachers
    - Parents

11. Are there other issues or concerns related to accountability that need to be addressed?

Accountability Evaluation
Interview Protocol: State Implementers

MAP is a private consulting firm working as a subcontractor to WestEd on a project funded by the California Department of Education.

The study I am working on is investigating the relationship between state level accountability policies and procedures and what actually happens in school districts, schools and classrooms. Today I would like to focus on the perspective of state officials.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Note: During interview, keep a running record of all relevant materials mentioned, and ask for them at the end of the interview.

Name:
Title:
Years in position:
Previous experience:

1. What is your understanding of the purpose of an accountability system? What problems is it designed to address?

2. What do you perceive as the primary mechanisms which drive the state's accountability system? How are these related to each other?

   Prompts: State standards, state assessment, curriculum frameworks, textbook adoption, STAR, others

3. How far along in development and implementation are these components and how well are they aligned?

4. What training has the CDE provided to districts on local standards development and implementation? On local assessment systems? On local accountability systems? On using data from local accountability systems?

5. How is the CDE using data from local accountability systems? What are future plans for use?

6. How are the districts and schools using the data from local accountability systems? What plans are there for future use and how far along in implementation are the districts?

7. How have federal and state categorical programs and initiatives influenced the State's accountability system and what is their relationship to each other?

Prompt: What about the State's current Title 1 (IASA) student performance data analysis and reporting requirements? How do Title I schools compare with non-Title I schools in the degree of standards-based accountability system implementation?

Prompt: What about the current initiatives to identify, provide incentives and intervene to support high to low performing schools?

8. Which of these policies, programs or initiatives provide technical assistance to schools? What has been the focus and nature of that support? (e.g. get a sense of magnitude)

   Prompt: ask about how many workshops, conferences held, how many districts/schools participate and what they have covered.

9. Which decision-making bodies and individuals at the state level have primary responsibility for overseeing accountability policy and mechanisms?

   Prompt: what is the role of the state board vs. state department vs. legislature vs. governor's office?

   Prompt: who is responsible for monitoring district and school performance? (e.g., Coordinated Compliance Review, Program Quality Reviews, student test score analysis, etc).

10. What is your (and your division's) role and responsibility in directing and supporting the state's accountability system? How much time do you spend on related tasks in a given day/week?

11. How would you characterize early evidence of the impact or changes from standards-based accountability? What appear to be positive outcomes? Negative outcomes?

12. What do you see as emerging best practices of standards-based accountability systems? Why?

13. What state-level practices and documents have <u>helped</u> districts and schools in implementing their systems?

14. Are there state-level practices that you feel have <u>hindered</u> districts and schools in implementing their systems? If so, what are they and how could they be improved?

15. How are other education-related institutions such as universities, regional laboratories, foundations, subject matter projects, the California Leadership Association, Comprehensive Assistance Centers, test publishers, etc., helping schools and districts in implementing their systems?

16. What problems are districts having with implementation?

17. What, if any, additions or changes in the law could help alleviate these problems? (i.e., are there changes that could be made by the Legislature that would better meet the intent of the law and lead to more successful implementation?). What, if any, additions or changes could the CDE make in practice to help alleviate these problems?

18. Which of the strategies above do you see as being most important in helping districts successfully implement accountability mechanisms? (i.e., changes in the legislature, CDE, districts, or schools)?

19. Which districts do you think have an exemplary accountability program and why?

20. Is there anything else we haven't discussed that you'd like to mention about the accountability system?

Accountability Evaluation
Interview Protocol: District Administrators

District:

Name:

Date:

Interviewer:

District-Level Officials: Accountability Interview Questions

1. Tell us about your district's accountability system. [*Prompt*: what do you think the key elements are?]

2. Do you have districtwide standards in place? If so, to what extent are they aligned with:
   - State Board-approved standards?
   - District instructional materials?
   - Instruction in the classroom?

   What is your sense of the extent of common understanding of these standards among district staff, principals, teachers, students, and parents?

3. When did your district begin developing an accountability system?
   - What prompted your district to begin developing an accountability system? (National movement, federal regulations, etc)
   - Where did you start ? (certain grades, content areas, etc)
   - In what ways, if any, have state actions or policies influenced the nature of the accountability system your district has adopted or is developing?
   - Has the State's accountability system converged or conflicted with the district's prior reform efforts?

4. What future developments are being planned for the system?

5. What is your role in the accountability system?

6. Clarification questions about the district's system and implementation based on con-app and survey responses (standards, measures, how measures are combined)

   For instance: Have you had any problems with [district's particular assessment measures]? *(This is designed to get at reliability and validity without making the interviewee feel like we are doing a compliance review)* What process did the district use in comparing its standards to the State standards?

7. Please describe for <u>what</u> and <u>how</u> the following actors are held accountable in your district (if at all), even if there is no formal system in place:

   <u>District/Superintendent</u>

   - Accountable for what, to whom?
   - How measured?
   - Consequences (if any)?

   <u>Principals</u>

   - Accountable for what, to whom?
   - How measured?
   - Consequences (if any)?

   <u>Teachers</u>

   - Accountable for what, to whom?
   - How measured?
   - Consequences (if any)?

   <u>Students</u>

   - Accountable for what, to whom?
   - How measured?
   - Consequences (if any)?

   <u>Parents</u>

   - Accountable for what, to whom?
   - How measured?
   - Consequences (if any)?

Prompts:

- How is school performance assessed?
- Are targets set for individual schools?
- Are there absolute standards as well as standards for progress over time?
- How are school in need of improvement identified?
- What strategies are used for helping these schools?
- What incentives and consequences do schools face?

8. What data are gathered and how do you use them? [*Prompt:* Are data used to make decisions about instruction? If so, does data-driven decision-making appear to have an affect on student outcomes?] By what factors are data disaggregated? Are they accessible to the school board, principals, parents, teachers, and students? If so, in what forms, and when? What professional development opportunities, if any, are offered to district personnel, principals, and teachers on using the data?

9. What do you see as the biggest challenges to implementing a successful accountability system in your district? (Data management, staff resistance, reliable measures, etc.) Specifically, what assistance or additional resources do you need to address these challenges to implementing an effective accountability system in your district? (If funding, how would it be spent?)

10. What are the successful accountability policies and practices accomplished by your district? To what extent do you think they would be possible to replicate in other districts?

11. What were (are) the primary sources of assistance to your district in the development of an accountability system? (CDE, ACSA, County Office, etc.) How has the State helped or hindered? What additional assistance would you like?

12. What concerns, if any, do you have about the new accountability system being implemented by the state? (Valid measures of student achievement, excessive record keeping and reporting, etc.)

Mathematics Implementation Study
Interview Protocol: Principals

[Record district name, school name, principal name, and date and time of interview.]

Thank you very much for authorizing your school's participation in this study, for allowing us to come observe here and talk with some teachers, and for speaking with me today. The study that I am working on is about the kinds of school and classroom practices that contribute to high mathematics achievement, and the influence of state and local policies on mathematics instruction.

[If taping the interview] With your permission, I would like to tape record the interview so that I can concentrate on what you are saying rather than on note-taking. The tape recording will remain confidential. Is that okay?

Do you have any questions before we begin? Okay.

1. Tell me about your school's mathematics instructional program. *[Probe for underlying philosophy, scope and sequence (e.g., grade levels the same across schools in district, articulation, etc.)]*

2. Has the school undertaken any new initiatives recently that seem likely to have an effect on mathematics instruction? *[Probe for details on status of, changes in, and reasons for:*

   - *changes in curriculum materials and assessment*
   - *differentiated curriculum and instruction for students with special needs (LEP, special education, Title I, GATE, etc.)*
   - *the way teachers' time is organized to facilitate planning, professional development, collaboration, or other goals*
   - *school time or structure*
   - *the way students are scheduled and organized*
   - *student support services]*

3. To what extent has district policy required, encouraged, and/or supported these changes? What kinds of resources and assistance does the district make available to you?

4. How much discretion does the school have in determining its math curriculum? math textbooks and other instructional materials? curriculum coverage and pacing?

5. How much discretion do individual teachers have in these areas? Are there any committees within the school that make decisions about these issues?

6. What factors do you think exert the greatest influence over mathematics instruction in this school? *[Probe for state and district policies, SBE and district standards, SAT-9, other assessments, national influences (e.g., NCTM standards), professional development, teacher preparation, student demographic characteristics, etc.]*

7. What role does the school play in providing professional development in mathematics instruction for teachers? Do you have any particular priorities and goals for professional development in math? *[Probe for whether teachers are required to participate, how often, whether they have any choices, compensation, who sponsors, and who provides PD.]*

8. What do you think are the most effective kinds of professional development for your teachers in mathematics?

9. What factors do you think exert the greatest influence over *student achievement* in mathematics in this school? [*Probe for professional development, instructional strategies, school characteristics, student characteristics, parent involvement, etc.*]

10. What measures do you use to assess student mathematics achievement in your school? [*Probe for local state and national assessments, percentage of students meeting grade levels standards, etc.*]

11. Generally speaking, how would you rate student mathematics achievement in your school as a whole? *[Probe: what makes you think so?]*

12. Thinking about your school as a whole, what changes do you think are needed to improve math instruction? *[Probe for changes in how teachers work together, funding and other material resources (e.g., technology), parent involvement, and district or state policies.]*

13. These days there is a lot of emphasis placed on accountability. Have you felt that your school has been held accountable? If so, what have you been held accountable for and to whom? What impact, if any, has the state or district accountability system had on your school (not just in math instruction, but in general)?

Thank you so much for your time; you've given us some really valuable information. Can I get copies of the following materials you mentioned? Is there anyone else I should talk to in your school to get a perspective on the kinds of things that we have talked about?

Mathematics Implementation Study
Interview Protocol: Teachers

[Record district name, school name, teacher name, and date and time of interview.]

Pre-Observation Interview

Thank you very much for filling out our questionnaire and for allowing me to come see you teach. Before the observation, there are just a few questions that I'd like to ask you.

1. What has the class been doing in math recently?

2. What do you anticipate doing in your math class today?

3. What do you hope students will learn from the lesson?

4. Is there anything in particular that I should know about the group of students I will be observing?

5. Do you have any LEP students in your class? How many? Can you tell/show me where they sit? Do you have anything special planned for them?

After the observation, I'd like to speak with you again and ask you some more questions, if that's okay.

Post-Observation Interview

Thanks again for allowing me to observe your classroom teaching and for speaking with me today. The purpose of this interview is to gain an understanding of your perceptions of the lesson that I observed and also to ask you some other questions related to your mathematics teaching. More specifically, we are studying how policies and reforms have influenced math instruction in your classroom.

[if taping the interview] With your permission, I would like to tape record the interview so that I can concentrate on what you are saying rather than on note-taking, The tape recording will remain confidential. Is that okay?

Do you have any questions before we begin? Okay.

<u>Questions about the Observation</u>

First, I have some questions about the lesson that I observed.

1. Overall, how do you feel the lesson went?

2. Were there any ways in which the lesson was different from what you planned?

3. What did the lesson tell you about what the students are learning or still need to know in math?

4. What do you plan on doing tomorrow?

5. Would you say that today was a typical day? Why or why not?

Math Instruction: Philosophy and Practice

Now I'd like to ask you some general questions about your math teaching.

1. Can you briefly describe your general approach to teaching math with this class? *[E.g., basic skills, connection to daily life, preparation for SAT-9, etc.]*

2. What types of materials do you generally use when you teach math? Which do you use most often? How do you decide which materials to use? How do you acquire instructional materials within your school? How much input do you have in selecting instructional materials and resources? *[probe on who is involved in materials selection (e.g., teacher, school, district), accessibility to resources/materials, etc.]*

3. How do you decide generally if your students are progressing in math? How do you decide when a student needs special help or extra help, and what kind of help is provided?

4. *[If applicable]* What do you do to address the needs of English language learners in your classroom during math instruction?

Math Instruction: Influences

The next few questions are about things going on in math education today, what you think of them, and what influences your math instruction.

1. Are you particularly aware of any recent national, state, or district developments in math education? If so, can you summarize these developments in your own words and tell me what you think of them?

2. What documents and/or policies have had the greatest impact on your teaching? In what ways, if any, have policy decisions from the state of California (State Board, legislature, California Department of Education) influenced what and how you teach? How about policy decisions from your district?

3. These days there is a lot of talk about accountability. How would you describe your district's accountability system? Are there ways in which it influences your teaching?

4. How do you decide what mathematics to teach? What types of interactions do you have with other teachers or administrators in your building in terms of curriculum planning and development for math instruction? How do curriculum decisions get made in your school? *[Probe for who is involved]*

5. Do you have professional development opportunities related to math instruction? *[Probe for professional communities and teacher networks as well as staff development/in-service.]* If so, do these professional development activities enhance your effectiveness in teaching math? How?

6. Do you have access to people or resources that can help you with your math instruction? *[Probe on specific resources, e.g., curriculum specialists, Title I, special education]*

7. Is your school currently participating in any special programs or initiatives related to math instruction? If so, how does this influence your practice?

8. Did you do anything special to help your students prepare for this year's SAT-9 (mathematics)? If so, what, and for how long prior to the test? If not, are there any ways in which the SAT-9 influences your math teaching?

Effectiveness in Teaching Math

My final few questions are about how effective you feel your math teaching is.

1. What kinds of indicators do you use to gauge your effectiveness in teaching mathematics?

2. How comfortable do you feel teaching math at this grade level? Why?

3. Is there anything that gets in the way of your effectiveness as a math teacher? If so, what?

4. What, if anything, would help you improve your math instruction?

5. Is there anything else you would like to talk about that we haven't covered?

Thank you for your time; you've given us some really valuable information. I really appreciate it and have enjoyed talking with you.